First Call for Children

'The essential needs of children should be given priority in bad times as well as good' — *Plan of Action, World Summit for Children*

# Family connections

UNICEF India

**A Kurdish family in Erbil, northern Iraq. Families, the first line of defence for children, are under new stresses.**

This year, as the world accelerates towards the widely endorsed mid-decade goals for children, it also commemorates the International Year of the Family. The convergence affords yet another avenue through which to channel the already strong efforts countries are making to reach the targets for 1995.

Progress towards the mid-decade goals occurs one child at a time and nowhere is a more reliable and resourceful ally in the process to be found than in the family. It is families who ensure their children are immunized, families who mix and give oral rehydration salts, who demand and use iodized salt. It is families who can see the goals most clearly — at the crucial point where they intersect, at the child.

This issue of ***First Call for Children*** marks the beginning of the Year of the Family by looking at some of the issues facing societies' basic unit in this age of challenge and transition. We also report on the growing proof of the good effects of vitamin A, the amazing coalition — Pact for Children — that is making such progress for children in Brazil, and the new collaboration between non-governmental organizations and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

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# First Call for Children

'The essential needs of children should be given priority in bad times as well as good' — *Plan of Action, World Summit for Children*

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# Strong coalition gives further boost to child rights in Brazil

***The child rights campaign of the late 1980s in Brazil, which brought revolutionary legal reforms, has evolved into a permanent, well-organized and politically mature movement. As democratization takes hold, a growing number of organizations are working together to guarantee that legal reforms are implemented and that children's rights remain high on the political agenda. In 1991, the organization Pact for Children was created to galvanize all sectors of society to fight on behalf of the country's children. Today it has a membership of more than 100 influential government leaders and institutions, including private businesses, trade unions, media organizations, universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). ALEXIA LEWNES reports.***

UNICEF/Brazil

**High level support for children: In July 1993, at the second major meeting of Governors in Brazil, state plans of action to protect the well-being of children were reviewed and 500-day short-term goals were identified. From left: Henrique Santillo, Minister of Health; Celso Amorim, Minister of External Relations; Humberto Lucena, President of the National Congress; and Itamar Franco, President of Brazil, attended.**

Taped on the wall of a children's recreational centre in a slum in Rio de Janeiro is a towering sheet of brown paper that spells out the rights of children. The illustrations, drawn with a magic marker, are simple but their messages are powerful: "Here, every child has the right to an education, to be healthy, to respect, liberty and dignity."

From such small community centres to the floors of the Brazilian parliament, the mobilization of children's rights — based on the Convention of the Rights of the Child — is very much alive. In an exciting departure from the country's past, there is a growing recognition that children are citizens, entitled to basic economic, social and cultural rights.

Yet poverty denies many Brazilian children access to primary health care, basic education and humane treatment.

In 1990, more than half of Brazilian children and adolescents, numbering almost 30 million, lived in families whose income was less than half the minimum wage. The quality of children's lives varies significantly from region to region: In the north-east, where 75 per cent of children lived in poverty in 1990, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, twice as many infants died (75 per 1,000 live births) than in the south-east.

Violence against children is one of the most serious problems facing Brazilian society today. Data from the Federal Police indicate that between 1988 and 1991, more than 1,500 Brazilian children were "exterminated" each year — nearly one every six hours.

"The Pact for Children exists to pressure the Government to join the fight for children," says Wanderlino Nogueira Neto from the National Forum for the Defence of Children's and Adolescents' Rights (Forum DCA), a coalition of 39 national NGOs dedicated to promote and defend children's rights.

### Governors get involved

It has been five years since the country created a new Constitution and improved democratization at all levels. The process continues as the country moves towards decentralization, with states and municipalities assuming greater responsibility for providing social services for their citizens. Recognizing that a commitment on the state level is necessary for the improvement of the situation of children, in 1992 Pact for Children decided to engage state Governors to prepare state plans of action.

The first Governors' Summit for Children was held in May 1992 and 25 (out of 27) Governors committed themselves to prepare state plans of action; as of July 1993, 24 Governors had finalized them. They also formulated short-term plans of action, covering the next 500 days, based on 29 goals agreed upon by all state Governors. Specific indicators that measure improvement towards reaching those goals have also been identified. Every 100 days, state officials, child rights activists and the press attend regional meetings to evaluate the process of these 500-day plans of action. The results are then made public.

"The Pact cannot be understood as a movement of a half a dozen people or agencies," says Aristides Junqueira, Attorney General of Brazil. "It's much more than that. We have almost all of the governors and representatives of all sectors of society involved, fighting for the rights of children." *(See Interview, page 3.)*

Political commitment can result in small miracles, according to Ciro Gomes, Governor of Ceará, the nation's third poorest state. "Since 1987 in Ceará we have turned water to wine," he says, referring to the changes in the state since he and his predecessor made children a priority, reducing child mortality by a third in three years. "We were able to not only use money more efficiently, but also fight against corruption, get the people involved and choose correct partners," says Gomes. "Without money it's impossible, but if you have money and no political will, your money's no good."

### Making politics accountable

Last year, a television commercial,

*continued on page 2*

UNICEF/4843/Schytte

**Today, one out of every three households in the world is headed by a woman. Here are two Guatemalan women with their children.**

## A year to renew the family

The family unit, buffeted by economic and social change, faces uncertainty and challenge. In recognition of both the power and needs of families, the United Nations General Assembly has named 1994 the International Year of the Family (IYF).

Helping governments, policy makers and the public understand the role and strength of this unit, which has for so long been taken for granted, is an important goal of IYF, as it celebrates and supports "the smallest democracy at the heart of society."

Increasing poverty, urban migration, political transformation and social and technological change have all profoundly affected families around the world. In many instances, the pace of change is outstripping the capacity of families to adapt and to meet the basic needs of some of their members.

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## *New proof of vitamin A deficiency dangers*

***Approximately 40 million children worldwide suffer from vitamin A deficiency. Its toll is grim: A quarter of a million children go blind and more than 1 million children die from it each year. Now, recent studies suggest that even moderate vitamin A deficiency — largely undetected and unrecognized — may be endangering the lives of millions more.***

Vitamin A deficiency can steal a child's vision. What is only just being realized is that it may first steal his life.

Recent studies indicate that in children from the age of six months onward, even moderate short-term deficiencies of vitamin A can increase the risk of severe infections and death.

"We have a hunch that in a lot of developing countries where there are no clinical signs, there may be children with marginal deficiencies," says David Alnwick, Senior Advisor (Micronutrients) at UNICEF. "Even marginal deficiency impairs a child's immune system and ability to fight disease. A child may die before xerophthalmia is diagnosed."

### Reassessment needed

Since most existing surveys of vitamin A deficiency were done prior to this new recognition of the effects of sub-clinical vitamin A deficiency, Mr. Alnwick recommends that all countries reassess whether or not they have a problem and where.

"The importance of giving vitamin A to children who are sick with measles, prolonged diarrhoea or severe protein energy malnutrition is now well established, but there's no routine policy of vitamin A treatment in many countries," says Mr. Alnwick. "Each country has to look at its options and develop a strategy, not just for sick children, but for all children."

In countries where intake is marginal, but which have very low levels of clinical deficiency, dietary intake of young children and reports of night blindness should be reassessed.

Areas with a high prevalence of child protein-energy malnutrition, high

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READEX FICHE

# Making people aware of mines in El Salvador

UNICEF/5523/Isaac

**In extremely poor countries, the cost of clearing a single mine (US$300-1,000) is higher than most people's annual income. Above, a young girl who lost both legs in a land-mine explosion receives rehabilitation assistance in Kabul (Afghanistan).**

The war in El Salvador, which disabled more than 300,000 children and adolescents, continued to claim victims even after the peace accord in January 1992.

Deactivating the deadly explosive devices and mines responsible was a new challenge for the country emerging from 12 years of bitter strife. Widely dispersed and their exact locations largely undocumented, the mines took the greatest toll on children, who comprised 75 per cent of all victims.

The Mine Awareness Project in El Salvador, a unique educational campaign coordinated by UNICEF, was started in May 1992 to reduce injuries and deaths. A publication, *The UNICEF Mine Awareness Project in El Salvador*, explains the extraordinary success of this project in identifying the dangers and alerting rural communities and children to them.

A critical challenge was ensuring the cooperation of the Salvadoran Armed Forces and the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN), formerly bitter enemies. FMLN efforts were particularly vital in identifying mined areas, since their fighting units operated largely independently and thus no documentation was kept on where mines where placed. Surviving FMLN members cooperated by drawing simple maps and diagrams showing approximate locations of minefields.

The results were dramatic: Less than six months after the campaign began, 25,000 mines — believed to be nearly all of those existing — were identified and wooden stakes painted with skulls and crossbones marked the minefields. UNICEF produced 5,000 posters, for display in schools, clinics and community areas, to explain to both readers and non-readers what the dangers were and how to proceed safely.

The second phase of the programme is an ongoing public awareness campaign. In addition to the posters already displayed, television and radio spots are broadcast several times a day in rural areas where the mines and other explosives are most prevalent. Three- to five-minute radio mini-programmes, which include interviews with victims of a mine accident and safety messages based on a folkloric story, further reinforce the message.

A mobile unit has also trained teachers, health workers, community leaders and staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in isolated communities to pass on the mine-safety message. By the end of 1992, less than six months after the campaign began, nearly 2,000 people committed to spreading the message of safety and caution were trained.

# Boost to child rights in Brazil

*continued from page 1*

showing images of governors dissolving into the faces of children, announced: "Governors who were once young people are preparing plans for young people who want to grow up. We expect these plans to become a reality."

"We are trying to find a way to create accountability for the public sector — to transform speeches into actions," says Hiran Castello Branco, President of the National Advertising Council, a coalition of private volunteer advertising agencies that handles the Pact for Children campaign. The council has already prepared two television commercials for Pact and will design new messages after each 100-day meeting to keep people informed about decisions and initiatives, thus also keeping pressure on the Government.

The increased political competence of NGOs has transformed the role of many organizations from that of service-delivery into the broader one of advocacy. Several are forming alliances and exchanging experiences to strengthen their capabilities and increase their power. "NGOs are maturing now and are much more organized," says Mr. Neto. "Our main goal is to defend rights in general and construct a Brazilian citizen."

The 1988 Constitution and new legislation make it possible for NGOs to actively participate in the political decision-making process, as members of Councils on the Child and Adolescent at the national, state and municipal level. The councils, whose membership is divided equally between the governmental and non-governmental sectors, set priorities and policies and monitor implementation. Twenty-three out of a possible 27 state councils already exist as well as more than 2,000 municipal councils, and the numbers are growing daily. "The councils will pressure the Government to use the money for schools and education," says Mr. Neto. "They are critical to define the priorities and monitor the governments."

**Mobilization on all levels**

"A few years ago only a small number of children were talking about children's rights," says Mr. Branco. "Now, everyone is involved." Private businesses donate funds and technical expertise to defend children's rights, and promote them on packaging materials and on posters. The Brazilian Micro and Small Companies Support Service, together with the Brazilian Association of Printing Industries, is financing the production of 1 million copies of *Facts for Life* (FFL), while major supermarket chains display the FFL messages on their nylon bags.

Even the largest and most influential union in the country, Força Sindical, a federation of 700 unions and 6 million workers, is getting involved. In October, the union signed an agreement with UNICEF for technical assistance to prepare training materials for union activists working on behalf of children. The union is developing workshops on child labour and educating its members on the laws relating to children and work, among other projects.

"We have the capacity to improve the condition of children," says Nair Goulart, National Secretary for Women, Children and Adolescents of the Força Sindical. "We realize it's not enough to discuss salary and income any more, but rather political issues, to help define where the country is going."

Church involvement remains strong, and today 53,000 members of the Minors Pastorate of the National Council of Brazilian Bishops work as community leaders around the country to secure the basic rights of children. The Pastorate also publishes and disseminates information on the municipal councils, as well as training materials to assist communities in setting up new councils.

In the media, the successful Crianca Esperanza (Child Hope) campaign of TV Globo has raised US$9 million in seven years on behalf of children, and has been instrumental in raising awareness among the general public of children's issues, including infant mortality, child health and poverty. Members of the National Association of Broadcasting, consisting of 4,000 radio and television stations, are running *Facts for Life* spots. And local radio personalities are attending training workshops on children's issues.

By the end of 1993, 700 broadcasters had participated in 20-hour workshops, sponsored by UNICEF and the Netherlands Committee for UNICEF, designed to help them develop programming that will educate the public on the rights of children. Meanwhile, print journalists have seized children's rights as a hot topic and hundreds of articles and editorials on children appear monthly in newspapers and magazines across the country.

UNICEF, the executive secretary of the Pact for Children, plays a crucial role in advocacy and in coordinating the meetings and activities of the Pact's varied membership at federal, state and municipal levels.

It is clear that the rights of children are a national priority and will remain high on the political agenda, as the democratic process takes shape, enabling citizens to help define public policies. "The struggle against dictatorship was possible because people were engaged in elections, in the new Constitution and now in the fight against misery and poverty and for ethics in politics," says Herbert José de Souza (Betinho), a leading Brazilian sociologist, political scientist and social activist. "People are becoming aware of their civil rights and demanding them."

UNICEF/Lemos

**Children living in a slum in Rio de Janeiro participated in a celebration of Children's Day.**

## The Constitution and laws

The drafting of a new Constitution and the move towards democratization in Brazil presented a unique historical opportunity to discuss urgently needed policies for children.

Two proposals on behalf of children were made in 1988 to the Constituent Assembly. Supported by petitions signed by 1.4 million children and 200,000 voters, these proposals became the new Constitution's Chapter on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (articles 227 and 228), which introduced the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child one year before its adoption by the UN General Assembly.

The Chapter states: *"It is the duty of the family, society and the state to guarantee the child and adolescent, with absolute priority, the rights to life, health, food, education, leisure, professional training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, family and social life, and to protect them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, cruelty and oppression."*

In 1990, after a year of intensive debate and strong leadership from a growing child rights movement, the national Congress revoked the regressive Minor's Code and adopted the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Law 8069/90). This mandated profound reforms in the areas of law enforcement, juvenile justice and social services for children.

Decentralization of power from the federal level to the state and municipalities is mandated by the Constitution. The planning, execution and control of social programmes — especially in the area of education and health — are becoming the responsibility of local government.

To ensure that children are kept high on the political agenda, legislation was passed in 1991, creating joint governmental and non-governmental Councils for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent at federal, state and municipal levels. For the first time in Brazilian history, these Councils enable NGOs and others to participate in the formulation and regulation of public policies.

# Children's rights find a voice in the Central African Republic

**By Julia Spry-Leverton**

On the campus of the law faculty of the University in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), students lounge in the shade, chatting and reading between classes. As Honoré Kponton, UNICEF Information Officer, emerges from a UNICEF vehicle with an armful of journals, a boisterous group of students surrounds him, grasping for copies.

Such is the hunger for printed information in CAR. The paper being distributed was the first issue of a bulletin called *Ndeli*, a journal focusing on the children of CAR, produced by the country's Alliance for the Survival and Development of the Child in the Central African Republic (ASPDEC).

In recent years, massive strikes and unemployment have taken their toll on the children of CAR, who account for 43 per cent of the nation's population. The Alliance is dedicated to publicizing this fact and promoting an agenda to improve the situation.

**Getting the word out**

Articles range from news, analyses and philosophical debate to straightforward health information, taken directly from the publication, *Facts for Life*. The first 12-page issue of the journal discusses the problems of street children — 2,000 to 3,000 of them are estimated to haunt the streets of Bangui — and reports on the debilitating condition of goitre, which affects 60 per cent of the population.

The Alliance was formed in late 1991 and includes academics, politicians, media, civil servants, artists and performers. Its primary aim is social mobilization in support of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

*Ndeli* is the vehicle by which the word is spread, distributed in the rural areas through the primary health care system, including immunization centres. The Alliance seeks to widen the publication's reach by distributing it through other interest groups, including non-governmental and religious organizations. With these links established, the Alliance can progress to its secondary aim of rallying support behind the practical programmes for children, which form the basis of the country's national programme of action.

With a 25 per cent rate of chronic child malnutrition, fewer than 50 per cent of children attending school, and HIV infection and AIDS on the rise among young people under 15, there are many fronts in urgent need of social action. Last year's Day of the African Child was chosen for launching an initiative to provide a city day-care centre for street children. The converted civic building, with newly installed showers and sports facilities, was the venue for the celebrations.

The name 'Ndeli' refers to the cry of a little bird in one of CAR's well known childhood songs. There is hope that with the new journal, the song may swell into a veritable anthem, leading to progressive action on behalf of some of the neediest children in the world.

*Julia Spry-Leverton is a freelance writer and a UNICEF consultant.*

# Brazil Attorney General discusses country's protections for children

***Changes in Brazil's laws offer children hope for the future. The Attorney General spoke about some of them with ALEXIA LEWNES.***

UNICEF/Lewnes

**Aristides Junqueira, Attorney General of Brazil (above), points out that the laws and Constitution of Brazil have been modified to protect children's rights. The challenge now is to put them into practice.**

*Q: How is your office defending the rights of children?*

A: We signed an agreement of joint cooperation with the state of Rio de Janeiro after the Candelaria killings, where eight children were killed. With this agreement, our purpose was not only to identify the guilty people who should be charged with the killings, but also to identify the general causes behind this violence. This investigation is being successfully conducted with the help of the Latin American Centre of Studies on Health and Violence, which operates in Rio de Janeiro. We intend to sign agreements with all states in order to work together on investigations of all subjects relating to children — not only related to violence. The agreement with Rio has to do specifically with violence, but we want to know why public authorities fail to take care of children in many areas.

We have other agreements with groups associated with the University of São Paulo to conduct studies specifically related to violence, in order to design a profile of people who kill and find out why they kill. Right now, it is still very difficult to identify the killers.

With these agreements and with the information that we have already disseminated to the state police and to the state ministries, individuals have been identified in a few cases. Two years ago, nothing like this would have happened. We are very far from an ideal situation, but this is a good start, I think.

*Q: What are the challenges and problems in implementing the Statute of the Child and Adolescent?*

A: In our field specifically, I find a resistance on the part of the judges. Some judges have even declared that many of the articles in the Statute go against the Constitution.

The judges' attitudes are difficult to change probably because they lost a significant amount of power with the Statute. The legislation that existed before — the Minors' Code — gave judges more power than the Statute does. *[Under the previously existing Minors' Code (enacted in 1979), children were made wards of the court if they were in any "irregular situation," ranging from simply living on the street to having broken the law. Now under the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, the authority of judges is limited to cases requiring legal action such as juvenile crime, questions of parental custody and adoption. Other cases requiring social action are now referred to an elected Guardianship Council, composed of people with expertise in working with children.]*

When a child or youth has not broken the law, his problems can now be dealt with at the family and the local level. This is taking power out of the hands of judges and this may be what they don't like.

The Statute is an innovation. The old law addressed the criminal behaviour of children. This is just a small chapter within the Statute whose emphasis is more on prevention than punishment. The Statute presents another dimension to the problems of children and youth. They are not judicial problems but social ones, and the society should address them.

*Q: Are there similar problems with the police?*

A: If we know of cases where policemen are participating in child extermination, we also know of situations where the military police are educating children, like in Minas Gerais where groups of children systematically go to police stations for help. This is a recent phenomenon but it is something worth mentioning because it's an indication of change. The police are state police and each state works differently.

*Q: Are there other challenges in defending the rights of children?*

A: In the press — print and television — we seldom see constructive images of street children. We see them stealing but never doing anything good.

The mentality today is to eliminate this child so that we don't see the problem. This is what has to change and it's not easy. We have to attack this problem little by little because we cannot confront the problem head on. There is no magic solution.

How can you prevent crime and misbehaviour? With education, with improved health conditions, by integrating children's concerns into society. The mentality has to change. We always consider children as lawbreakers but we should ask ourselves: Was this child given enough education, health and everything else that he needs?

*Q: What is your role in implementing the changes that are taking place?*

A: We have the legislation. Our work is then not to improve the legislation but rather to implement the laws and put them into practice. Our main role is to implement policies that defend children and adolescents and to coordinate the state public ministries to do the same.

However, we can do more at this moment because of the credibility this office has which comes from the fact that we don't have a political or ideological position. Our role is to apply the law and to make the Constitution a reality.

*Alexia Lewnes is a consultant writer and editor, UNICEF New York.*

# *Protein supplementation has long-term benefits*

Improving a child's diet not only betters the child's immediate survival prospects but also his or her physical and intellectual status later in life, according to the results of nearly two decades of research conducted in Guatemala.

Among the most surprising results was the discovery that protein supplementation in early childhood improved the intellectual performance of those who received it over the long term — in adolescence and adulthood — more than in their preschool years. Those whose mothers had received the supplement while pregnant and those who received the supplement themselves during their first two years of life showed the greatest long-term improvement in intellectual performance.

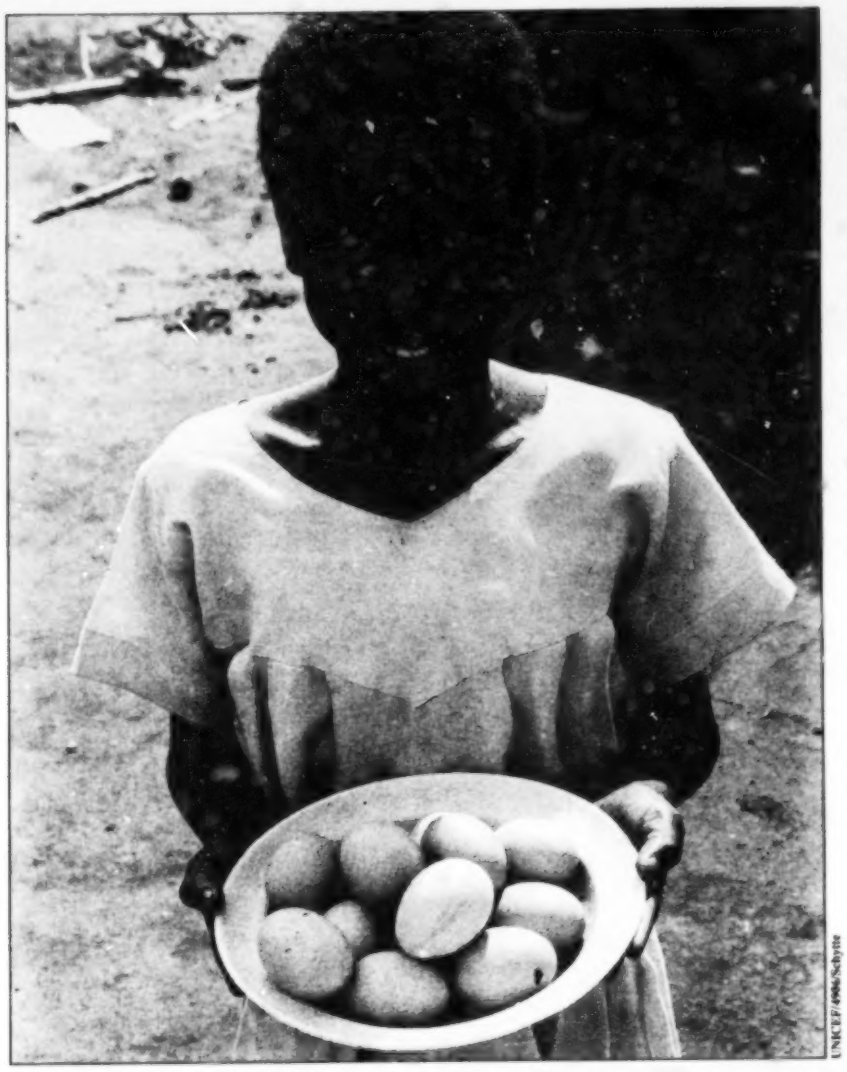
Based on the results, nutritional supplementation programmes aimed at mothers and children in poorly nourished communities may be among the best of long-term economic development strategies.

**Immediate and long-term boon**

Entire villages received the supplement, but only randomly selected groups of children under seven years of age, mothers with children under two years of age

*continued on page 5*

# New findings show benefits of vitamin A



UNICEF/4986/Schytte

**Even marginal vitamin A deficiency can impair a child's immune system and increase the risk of death. Eggs are an excellent source of the vitamin.**

*continued from page 1*

infant and child mortality rates, known seasonal food shortages and periodic droughts, and areas with a high prevalence of diarrhoea and measles morbidity and mortality are likely to be areas of vitamin A deficiency.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is currently putting together a global data bank of vitamin A deficiency to help determine the extent of moderate and sub-clinical deficiency as well as severe cases. Right now it is known that clinical vitamin A deficiency is most prevalent in South Asia, South-East Asia, parts of Africa, north-east Brazil, and parts of Central America.

**What studies show**

The most recent analysis of community-based field trials of vitamin A supplementation concluded that mortality rates dropped 23 per cent when children received vitamin A.

The children in the studies were between the ages of six months and five years old, and very few displayed the textbook signs of deficiency such as xerophthalmia.

Those with diarrhoea and measles appeared to respond most favourably to supplementation; those with respiratory diseases or malaria showed little or no improvement. The main benefit was that diseases such as diarrhoea and measles were less severe in supplemented children.

Reducing the severity and duration of childhood disease, however, can significantly reduce deaths, especially in developing countries with limited medical facilities. A study in South Africa on children with measles indicated that those who received high dose vitamin A therapy had shorter hospital stays (10 versus 13 days), required less intensive care (4.3 per cent versus 10.5 per cent), and had a lower death rate (1.6 per cent versus 5 per cent) than those not receiving the vitamin. The therapy saved an estimated US$200 per case in hospitalization costs alone.

In a field trial in Ghana, clinic attendances and hospital admission rates dropped by 12 and 38 per cent respectively when children received monthly doses of vitamin A supplements.

**Vulnerable months**

Breastfed children are rarely deficient in vitamin A, since breastmilk is a good source. The greatest risk from deficiency is to young children between the ages of 6 and 24 months, a time when vitamin A requirements for growth and development are proportionately greater, and when children are most at risk of developing infections and diarrhoeal diseases that impair absorption of the vitamin. It is the time when most children are weaned.

Mothers, therefore, need to understand how to wean correctly, continuing to supply breastmilk as they introduce vitamin A-rich foods into their child's diet. The best absorbed foods are those of animal origin, such as meat and liver, but in areas where these foods are not available or are too expensive, fruits and vegetables rich in carotene (which is converted to vitamin A by the body) can be used instead. The addition of a little vegetable oil helps ensure that the carotene is absorbed. Vitamin A is present in animal products such as liver, milk, butter and eggs, and as carotene in several cereals, in yellow and leafy green vegetables such as carrots, cassava leaves and spinach, in yellow-coloured non-citrus fruits such as mangoes and papayas, and in red palm oil.

**Detecting deficiency**

A blood test or breastmilk sample can reveal vitamin A deficiency, but both tests require sophisticated and expensive laboratory equipment, which relatively few countries have. In countries where blood tests cannot be easily carried out, the best and most effective way to detect marginal and moderate deficiencies will be by rapid dietary surveys and assessments.

Also, if mothers notice their children have night blindness — difficulty seeing in the dark — vitamin A deficiency is likely to be a problem.

**Vitamin supplements**

Large-scale massive-dose supplementation programmes are the most cost-efficient means of achieving the 1995 objective of eliminating vitamin A deficiency in most countries.

According to Mr. Alnwick, the best programme is one where appropriate doses are provided regularly (perhaps every month, every two, or every four to six months, depending on opportunities to make contact with the child) to all children between 6 months and at least 24 months of age in deficient areas. Some countries have chosen to give supplements with immunizations, when parents and children are in regular contact with health workers *(see article on facing page for Viet Nam's experience)*.

Massive doses of the vitamin can be given because the body is able to absorb large quantities of vitamin A at one time and store it in the liver, releasing what is needed gradually.

However, very large doses of vitamin A given too close together can cause side-effects such as headache and nausea in children. Based on experience with the use of drugs with a structure similar to vitamin A, there is concern that very high doses given in pregnancy could lead to birth defects.

For this reason, high dose supplements of vitamin A should not be given during pregnancy. However, it is safe to give one large dose of vitamin A to a mother within one month after delivery, which will ensure adequate vitamin A in breastmilk. High dose supplements given to children should be recorded on the child's immunization or growth chart, to avoid the risk of giving repeat doses too frequently, according to Mr. Alnwick.

**Strategies and sustainability**

In Indonesia, monosodium glutamate (MSG) has been fortified with vitamin A, and in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, sugar is being fortified.

Fortification requires no change in food habits and is a relatively cheap and sustainable intervention. The challenge is to find foods that are widely consumed by women and children at risk. "Fortification is a good idea in countries where there is a well developed modern food industry and mothers of at-risk children purchase basic processed foods, such as oil and margarine," says Mr. Alnwick.

The most sustainable long-term approach is to ensure that families get the vitamin in their daily diet. But because this requires collaboration between agricultural, educational and health sectors and relies heavily on community involvement in dietary changes, it is also the most challenging.

"This can happen very quickly, but all the conditions must be right," says Mr. Alnwick. "You need a multi-pronged approach that will account for a variety of things including culture and perceptions."

To increase vitamin A consumption in the diet, home gardens, where carrots and leafy green vegetables are grown, are promoted; nutrition education is offered; and efforts are being made to encourage the preservation and consumption of certain vitamin A-rich foods.

In parts of West Africa and the Caribbean, for example, mangoes are an important source of vitamin A but are very seasonal. Efforts to preserve mangoes and give them to children in the dry season have been successful.

# *Indonesia makes A+ progress*

***A national survey in Indonesia in 1979 found that over 60,000 children each year suffered severe eye damage (xerophthalmia), one third of whom would become blind, from vitamin A deficiency. In response, the Government began to distribute high-dose vitamin A capsules and to encourage the consumption of vitamin A-rich foods. Today, xerophthalmia is no longer a public health problem in Indonesia. But nearly half of all children surveyed still have low serum vitamin A levels, which experts now recognize triple a child's risk of dying. Lessons learned from the successful vitamin A programme are helping as it now expands.***

Social marketing and comprehensive supply and distribution policies have proven powerful and effective tools in getting vitamin A supplements to those who need them in Indonesia.

Persuasive messages based on research into public knowledge, attitudes and practices have helped reach target audiences. Together, the ample supply of vitamin capsules by UNICEF — between 1985 and 1993, nearly 240 million were provided — and the Government's efficient distribution through mobile clinics, health centres and community workers ensured that capsules were available to meet the growing demand.

Today, the lessons learned are being applied in a national programme, with special efforts directed in 13 priority provinces. The major features of the programme include:

- providing funding and technical assistance to provinces for locally appropriate activities promoting vitamin A capsules;
- identifying two months of the year (every six months) as capsule-distribution months to focus attention and facilitate mass media promotion and monitoring;
- improving and expanding the scope of the local communication and distribution system to reach mothers who are unable to come to the village health post for capsules. Alternate distribution mechanisms include the use of Boy Scouts and the army, giving supplies through kindergartens, and 'sweeping' (door-to-door distribution to non-recipients);
- establishing an urban vitamin A programme with women volunteers from the community, trained in home-visit rapid assessment techniques and in interpersonal communications skills, acting as motivators. A training manual for the motivators has been developed.

## NATIONAL COMMITTEE NEWS

**Germany**: The German National Committee is supporting a campaign in which 6,000 German Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts will help raise awareness and funds for development projects in Nepal. The Committee plans an exhibition and will provide educational materials about Nepal and the Cheli Beti projects, which are effective informal education projects in literacy, health and hygiene for young girls in Nepal. The Scouts are also planning to hold a European jamboree in 1994 for 10,000 Scouts and a World Jamboree in 1995 for 30,000 Scouts, which will feature workshops on issues such as environment, food, international development processes, health and children's rights.

# Vitamins and vaccinations help children in Viet Nam

***In a motivated partnership, the Vietnamese Government and UNICEF are developing an ambitious programme for children. YVES WILLEMOT of the Belgian Committee for UNICEF visited Viet Nam recently and saw some of the fruits of this partnership. He found efforts to combat vitamin A deficiency in children, a project the Belgian Committee will help finance, particularly impressive.***

In Viet Nam, travelling is no easy matter. The main road linking Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City is like a piece of Swiss cheese, with potholes that make it practically impassable in certain places.

From Hanoi, to reach Thai Binh, a town 150 kilometres to the south, takes at least half a day. There, we were received by Mrs. Vu Thih Loan, the local director of the Association for Vietnamese Women.

The women's association devotes itself these days primarily to socio-economic activities — education, work-start and agriculture programmes. Because of its remarkable outreach in the region — three quarters of the women in Thai Bin are members — it is an ideal partner for UNICEF.

UNICEF/Lynch

**Distributing vitamin A through the country's immunization programme has proven successful in Viet Nam.**

### Health messages painted on walls

In the little village of Phu Chau near Thai Binh, we saw how issues such as poverty, health, nutrition and education are being tackled in an integrated fashion.

Vietnamese mothers, it is apparent, welcome advice on basic health matters. The booklet *Facts for Life*, which contains health basics, is particularly effective in Viet Nam since nearly 90 per cent of the population can read.

The ten 'commandments' of the booklet have been painted in giant letters on the walls of the village's main street. Many women have copied them onto a sheet of paper to hang in their homes. In addition, the local loudspeaker system that enables everyone to hear Vietnamese radio programmes broadcasts a half-hour programme every day that includes abstracts from *Facts for Life*.

### ABCs for good nutrition

Until recently, rice was almost exclusively the diet in much of Viet Nam, making for poor nutritional balance. Fortunately, with recent economic reforms, country dwellers have acquired their own plots of land and agricultural production is rising. And thanks to an innovative programme called VAC, the diet of the average Vietnamese person has become more balanced.

VAC is an acronym for the Vietnamese words 'vegetable gardens', 'fish-ponds' and 'small livestock'. Professor Tu Giay, known worldwide for his research on nutrition and recognized as the father of the VAC programme, is furious that the Vietnamese should suffer from malnutrition.

"In Viet Nam, we have all the resources necessary to enable us to develop in a balanced way," says Professor Giay. "Bad eating habits — rice accounts for 85 per cent of Vietnamese food intake — are largely responsible for the malnutrition our children are facing. When VAC is implemented nationwide, malnutrition will be no more than a bad memory."

We were able to see VAC in action in Vu Cong where UNICEF and the Women's Association have given loans in kind (worth US$1) to 200 families, that receive plants, fertilizer, hens, young fish, some tools and a piglet.

The addition of vegetables, fish, meat and eggs enriches children's diets. Surplus food is sold at the local market, with proceeds going to repay the debt in two years at 3 per cent interest, and the money is then used to help other families.

"These loans are unique," says Mrs. Vu Thih Loan. "Thanks to them, families manage to escape from a subsistence economy and improve their living conditions." The programme is being applied with equal success in schools and kindergartens.

Meanwhile, VAC has become an institution in Viet Nam. Everyone talks about it, even those who are not participating in it. Representatives from several other developing countries have come to consult Professor Giay on how to adapt the VAC concept to their own situations.

### Vaccinations and vitamin A

In the long term, the VAC programme will reduce vitamin A deficiency significantly in Viet Nam. Six thousand Vietnamese children have lost their sight because they did not receive their quota of vitamin A-rich meat, fruit and vegetables.

Yet, since a country's culinary traditions or eating habits do not change overnight, in the short term, large-scale distribution of vitamin A is necessary.

To learn how the vitamin is distributed through the vaccination programmes, we went to the province of Bac Thai and the little mountain village of Than Thai, half a day's travel from Hanoi.

There, 84 children were to be inoculated on the village's regular vaccination day, against measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis and poliomyelitis.

The director of the village health centre told us that every year 8 to 10 children die before the age of five from measles, diphtheria or diarrhoeal denydration. However, the child mortality rate has been falling since vaccination drives began in the village. UNICEF buys vaccines and needles for the syringes from the district hospital located about 9 kilometres from the village. At present, 70 per cent of the children of Than Thai are vaccinated.

Since the beginning of the year, all the children who come with their mothers to be vaccinated in the health centre also receive vitamin A capsules. The mothers have reacted very positively. According to the health centre director, "The health advice that has been broadcast has helped them understand the importance of the capsules for their children."

Vitamin A campaigns existed in the past but these were on a smaller scale. With support from the Belgian Committee for UNICEF, which will donate 45 million Belgian francs over a three-year period (approximately US$1.3 million), the campaign can be extended to the whole country and will reach all Vietnamese children and nursing mothers.

When eating habits improve through VAC, vitamin A deficiencies will decrease, as will the health problems associated with them. In the meantime, a vitamin A capsule costs only 25 cents, further proof that it is possible to reach very ambitious targets with very modest means.

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*Yves Willemot is the Director of Information of the Belgian Committee for UNICEF.*

## *Belgian Goodwill Ambassador joins in campaign for Viet Nam*

**Salvatore Adamo, a well-known singer and Goodwill Ambassador for the Belgian Committee for UNICEF, visited Viet Nam with the Belgian Committee for UNICEF.**

**At a health centre in Hai Hung Province, he met women whose children were about to receive vaccinations and vitamin A capsules. He also inaugurated a manual water pump in a children's garden.**

**Mr. Adamo also recorded two television spots in Viet Nam, which will be used to support the sale of greeting cards and other fund-raising activities.**

**As part of its information campaign, the Belgian Committee for UNICEF produced a 100-page information kit on Viet Nam, a one-hour radio programme including an interview with nutrition expert Professor Tu Giay, an ad for print media, two special issues of *Images de l'UNICEF* devoted to Viet Nam and a 12-minute video report produced with RTL (Radio Tele Luxembourg).**

## Protein supplementation

*continued from page 3*

and pregnant women were studied. A randomly selected control group was given a non-protein beverage.

Among the many immediate benefits of supplementation were improved birth weights in babies whose mothers received it and lower infant mortality rates. Growth retardation in Guatemala is most intense during the first three years of life, and the study showed that nutritional interventions during this time can have the greatest impact on growth.

The prevalence of severe stunting was reduced by half in villages where people received the nutritional supplement, but was virtually unchanged where the control beverage was given.

It also emerged in the follow-up study that those receiving supplementation as little girls during their first three years of life were taller and had greater muscle masses as women than those who had received the control beverage. Boys given the supplement in early childhood not only were taller and heavier as adult men than those who had received the control beverage, but they also had greater work capacity (maximal oxygen consumption).

The results are the culmination of nearly two decades of research in four rural Guatemalan villages by the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama and researchers at several North American universities.

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*For more information: See 'Enhancing Human Potential in Guatemalan Adults Through Improved Nutrition in Early Childhood', by Dr. Reynaldo Martorell,* Nutrition Today, *January/February 1993.*

## International congress

The World Federation of Public Health Associations' VII International Congress, 'Health, Economics and Development: Working Together for Change', will be held from 5 to 9 December 1994 in Bali (Indonesia). The official language of the Congress is English. Participation is open to all. For further information and abstract forms, please contact: the WFPHA Secretariat, c/o APHA, 1015 15th Street, N.W., Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005, USA, fax (202) 789-5681. Deadline for abstract submission is 15 May 1994.

# VIEWPOINT

## Giving children first priority

**By Bruce P. Corrie**

A new principle — of the preferential option for the child — related to the concept of 'first call for children', is gaining greater strength in the global arena. It implies the following points:

***» Children (especially those in poverty), regardless of their geographical location, national identity, gender or ethnicity, have the first priority in the allocation, consumption, production and distribution of the earth's resources.***

A starving child has a priority claim on resources essential for survival, wherever these resources are available in abundance. This implies that a child in inner city Chicago, or Somalia, or anywhere in the world, has a right to the world's resources necessary for survival.

If local governments fail to provide for the child, then the national authorities or the global community should take measures deemed necessary for the survival and development of the child.

***» Society has an inherent obligation to ensure that children's interests are represented in local, national and international organizations that influence child survival and development.***

New standards and procedures of accountability should be established for individuals, governments and institutions that directly influence the survival and development of children.

For international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), where power is concentrated in the hands of a few industrialized countries, greater accountability could be ensured by filling all executive positions in such organizations by election.

***» Society has an inherent obligation to devise integrated strategies that focus on all three environments of children: material, physiological and social.***

For example, projects aimed at the Dalit child in rural Tamil Nadu (India) would need multiple components: to prevent foeticide and infanticide of the female child; to heal the 'wounded psyches' of the Dalit child caused by the caste system; to offer legal protection to children and their parents when their rights are infringed upon and violence is committed against them; to empower people to organize to overcome oppressive structures such as race, class and caste; to raise the living standards of parents, especially mothers, who are often destitute agricultural workers; and finally to meet water, sanitation, health and educational needs.

Because no one organization could provide all these components, policy coordination and cooperation are essential.

### Child tribunals needed

Most essential to realizing all these principles and ensuring accountability of those responsible for making them become realities is the establishment of child tribunals at the local, national and global levels.

These child tribunals would be autonomous bodies with elected members who would fiercely defend the rights of the child in poverty, in the way central banks of the world, such as the German Bundesbank, fiercely defend the financial interests of their societies.

Members would have powers: to enforce legal penalties; to demand compliance with directives from individuals, institutions or governments; and to call for resignations of officials who have acted to the detriment of children.

### State tribunal

At the local level, the State Children's Tribunal (SCT) would monitor the living standards of children and serve as the advocate for children in the state legislature and the local courts. The SCT would also liaise with international organizations.

Members of the SCT would include those involved in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with children, concerned citizens, members of the state legislature and retired judges.

### National level tribunal

The National Children's Tribunal (NCT) would monitor national child trends and the national positions (and national representatives) on international organizations; issue recommendations to the national legislature and monitor compliance; work with the IMF consultation team to ensure that the status of the child in poverty is adequately represented in the team's country report to the IMF Executive Board; ensure that IMF teams and local officials working on 'adjustment' policies have devised proper safeguards for the child in poverty; be party to bilateral and multilateral treaties, such as GATT and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) as they impact on children; help develop comprehensive child strategies in the country; and serve as an advocate for children.

Representatives from the state tribunal could be elected to serve on the NCT. Other members of the NCT could be retired judges, national legislators, official national representatives of international organizations such as the World Bank and IMF, and the UN Resident Coordinator.

### International level tribunal

The International Children's Tribunal (ICT) would monitor global child trends and the impact on children of the activities of international organizations. It would also issue recommendations to the World Bank/IMF, the UNICEF Executive Board, organizations of the UN system, the Joint Consultative Group on Policy and other international organizations. Representatives from NCTs could be elected to serve on the International Children's Tribunal. Other members could include representatives from the IMF/World Bank Development Committee, the UNICEF Executive Board and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Court and international NGOs dealing with children.

The preferential option for the child can give hope and a future to children in poverty. The question is whether society has the collective will to move in this direction.

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*Bruce P. Corrie is Chair of the Division of Social Sciences at Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota (US) and was recently a Mondale Fellow at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.*

# *Famine averted in southern Africa*

**By Salim Lone**

For a continent regularly buffeted by famine, the story of the successful battle against a drought that seemed certain to claim hundreds of thousands of lives in southern Africa needs to be widely known. This success, engineered by the world's poorest and most crisis-ridden continent, also has a particularly special meaning at a time when Africa is seen, even by some of its own people, as a helpless continent unable to manage its day-to-day affairs, let alone handle a highly complex relief effort spread across a whole region.

In May 1992, Mr. Jan Eliasson, [then] head of the UN department coordinating humanitarian operations, said, "The drought ravaging southern Africa was now the worst in living memory." Commentators warned it could rival the one that gripped Ethiopia and Sudan in 1984-85 and claimed half a million lives. Total food output in 1992 was less than half that of the previous year. Four million tons of food aid needed to be rapidly sought from donor countries, to help feed about 20 million affected people spread over 2 million square miles in the 10 SADC (Southern African Development Community) countries. Emergency non-food needs totalled over $200 million. *The Wall Street Journal* wrote that "the question isn't whether there will be a calamity but whether it will last one or two years."

There were worries beyond widespread human suffering. As UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Botswana President Sir Ketumile Masire said in a joint statement in May 1992, the drought could "also wreak havoc on the economic stability of several of the drought-affected States."

The feared famine never transpired. An exemplary tripartite effort, led by the African countries themselves and coordinated by the UN system, had averted the hundreds of thousands of deaths that seemed inevitable. SADC mobilized to battle the disaster with a speed unprecedented for such poorly resourced countries. Early warning units had alerted the world to the looming famine at a very early stage, and FAO [the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN], with WFP [the World Food Programme], mounted multiple crop and food supply assessment missions covering all 10 countries within three weeks. The missions confirmed the enormity of the problem the region faced. The newly established Department of Humanitarian Affairs then prepared the UN system's first-ever famine relief appeal issued jointly by the UN and a regional body.

The donors, partly because they were pleased with the new unified appeals process initiated by the UN Secretary-General, responded immediately with food aid pledges covering virtually all that was needed, although the response to non-food aid was poor.

That was the easy part. In addition to the 4 million tons of emergency food imports for SADC countries, 5.2 million tons of cereals were required by South Africa as well. This meant that the region's transport infrastructure in 1992-93 had to handle an import load five times greater than normal.

But even this daunting challenge was met, as SADC countries mobilized for the international effort by giving it the highest political priority, with each one establishing a national drought relief coordinating body and ensuring that every governmental and parastatal unit needed for the relief effort — from ports and railways and other transport bodies, to medical, agricultural, water and immigration authorities — was committed to saving every life that it could. And, in pursuit of this goal, the transport ministers of SADC countries even took the then politically unpalatable step of meeting with their South African counterpart to ensure that that country's railroad infrastructure would also be mobilized for the region's food imports.

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*Reprinted from* Africa Recovery Briefing Paper No. 9, *August 1993.*

## Drought management study documents African success

**By Richard Morgan**

A study on the disaster averted in southern Africa, undertaken by Carol Thompson of the University of Zimbabwe, is a blueprint for drought management strategies, for members of the Southern African Development Community as well as others. Commissioned by UNICEF's office in Windhoek (Namibia) and its Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), the study describes in thorough detail the many stages and strategies of the fight against "the worst drought in living memory." Concrete, cost-efficient suggestions and experiences, gleaned from small group workshops in December 1992 and January 1993, are given.

Drought management, the study concludes, can only be fully effective if the conditions of poverty and inadequate basic services that are underlying causes of vulnerability are also addressed.

Among the study's recommendations were the need for the following:

- greater recognition in policy and programme design of the contributions of communities, families and particularly women in mitigating the drought's impact;
- greater attention to, and integration of, non-food interventions and resource requirements (particularly for health, nutrition and water) in planning drought relief responses — including by donors;
- operational and institutionalized early warning and disaster response mechanisms within national governments, along the lines of the positive examples already found in the southern African region;
- review and reconsideration of the design, speed of implementation and specifics of structural adjustment programmes (including their social costs and impact) so that severe shocks to vulnerable households and national finances during crises such as drought and conflict can be avoided.

Copies of the report may be obtained from Richard Morgan, UNICEF ESARO Nairobi, or Steve Adkisson, UNICEF Windhoek.

# Duchess of Kent visits development projects in Tanzania

UNICEF/Wright

**Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent is welcomed by crowds of children in Tanzania.**

**By Anna Wright**

At Sanya Station Village in Tanzania, the atmosphere is electric. The earthy red of the Masai dress and the sound of the herdsman's chant crowd the senses. Children strew petals on the dusty ground in preparation for the arrival of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent.

The Duchess, the Royal Patron of the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF, made a rare overseas visit last July to the United Republic of Tanzania, accompanied by Lord Bridges, Chairman of the Committee, and by its Executive Director Robert Smith.

The trip was planned so that the Duchess could get close to the people who benefit from UNICEF-assisted projects, giving her firsthand experience to help her in her work for UNICEF back home.

So along with official visits — to Tanzanian President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, for example, where the Duchess made a pledge on behalf of the UK Committee for US$2 million to support the UNICEF programme in Tanzania over the next three years — the Duchess saw a number of community-level projects in action.

### Tanzania's challenges

Tanzania has achieved a great deal in the social sector, but malnutrition and disease still claim the lives of 200,000 children under five every year.

As Agnes Aidoo, UNICEF Representative for Tanzania, explains, "Tanzania has committed itself to development in the most forceful way. Only 10 years after independence, clean water was available to nearly 70 per cent of the population and there was a school in every village. But over the years the economic crisis and the impact of external debt has led to a decline in services."

Currently, the country's external debt is about US$4.6 billion; the Government spends nearly 30 per cent of its annual budget in debt service payments.

Still, community-based approaches are making a difference. At the Erita Women's Group, the Duchess met women who have joined forces to improve their access to credit and receive training in business and record keeping. Group member Mama Pinda Pinda explained why she joined the income-generating scheme: "My husband had deserted us. At the health clinic they told me my child was underweight; my older children had to leave for school with empty stomachs."

The women's group has received a loan of US$4,200 from a revolving credit fund established by the National Bank of Commerce and UNICEF. Mama Pinda Pinda used her loan to set up a small-scale business selling charcoal, earning money that ensures her children no longer go hungry.

UNICEF and its partners are helping improve the facilities, training personnel and assisting basic but life-saving work such as the distribution of mosquito nets impregnated with insecticide. Malaria is a common cause of death among children in Tanzania; children under the age of five may have as many as six bouts of the disease each year, and treatment is increasingly problematic in the face of growing resistance to chloroquine. Since 1991 more than 50,000 treated mosquito nets have been distributed, and malaria cases have fallen significantly as a result.

The Duchess then flew to Mwanza District on the shores of Lake Victoria — a region where the social and economic impact of HIV/AIDS is keenly felt.

For Her Royal Highness, a chance to join a lively AIDS education lesson at Lake Secondary School was one of the highlights of the tour. She sat among the students as they frankly and openly discussed safe sex and other issues surrounding HIV and AIDS. When the Duchess asked the class whether they knew people who had died from AIDS-related illnesses, every hand went up.

"I was pleased that the Duchess understood the problem of AIDS and was so interested in what we are doing," said Justine Butolwa, a 17-year-old student. "Her message encouraging us to educate others about AIDS will stay with me."

It is estimated that 7 per cent of adult females and 5 per cent of men in Tanzania are infected with HIV, and the growing number of AIDS orphans is estimated at around 110,000. Later that day the Duchess was to meet some of these orphans at the Kuleana Centre *(see story below)*.

Lord Bridges, Committee Chairman, who worked closely with Her Royal Highness in planning the tour, believes the benefits of the visit to Tanzania will be far-reaching. "This extraordinary visit will enable us to raise the profile of UNICEF's work back in the United Kingdom and assist our efforts to support UNICEF's work in Tanzania through future fund-raising.

Agnes Aidoo said, "She has come here and held the children in her arms but at the same time she has seen communities which are working very hard to improve their conditions. This willingness to work together for change is what gives us hope."

*Anna Wright is Information/ Communications Officer at the UK Committee for UNICEF.*

# *Children show one fair lady the street where they live*

**By John Usher**

Mwita's spirited dance to Paul Simon's song 'The Boy in the Bubble' was a show-stopper. The Duchess of Kent led the loud applause for him. He was whisked into the royal car and driven around town. A dream of a day, especially for a boy whose five years on earth have been a living nightmare.

But this was not a gala performance in London. It was a show put on by children in a grubby house in Mwanza, a run-down Tanzanian town on the southern shores of Lake Victoria. Mwita, who has lived on Mwanza's mean streets since he was orphaned by AIDS at the age of four and a half, is the baby of the Kuleana drop-in centre for street children.

Kuleana is a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded last year by two young US-educated Tanzanians, Mustafa Kudrati and Rakesh Rajani. Kudrati, a post-graduate student at Northwestern University, abandoned a Ph.D. programme to return to Tanzania to work full time for destitute children. Rajani, a high school friend, fresh from Harvard, joined him to launch Kuleana, the urban AIDS action group concerned primarily with street children's rights. The name is a Swahili word meaning 'caring for each other'.

Neither of them have money and the shaky organization relies on donations from local individuals, international agencies and NGOs.

Initially, UNICEF helped finance a situation analysis of street children and a workshop for community awareness. More support is being provided to help further develop the centre as a place of learning, support and legal protection.

### Coping with AIDS

Mwanza, the commercial hub of what is known as the Lake Zone, is struggling with a growing population of orphans as the result of one of the highest rates of HIV infection and AIDS in Tanzania. HIV sero-prevalence among females in Mwanza region is 5.3 per cent. Among males, it is 5.2 per cent. The National AIDS Control Programme estimates that Tanzania-wide, 7 per cent of adult women and 5.4 per cent of men are HIV-infected.

Street children are open to abuse of every kind. Sleeping on sidewalks, parking lots, under food stalls, they are each day confronted with a frightening array of challenges and violence. Without food, they are forced to beg, scavenge or pick through garbage for scraps. Undernourished, with respiratory infections or sexually transmitted diseases, they are frequently turned away from health centres. Resented as a nuisance by local authorities and society generally, they are beaten, harassed by police and occasionally jailed.

The Kuleana drop-in centre provides the children — forced onto the streets by poverty, neglect, abuse, broken homes and the loss of parents — with shelter, food, showers, basic literacy courses and AIDS information. If they hear of youngsters being picked up by the police, Kudrati and Rajani go to the authorities to secure their release.

Situated on a busy street, the drop-in centre attracts considerable attention from passers-by, not least because of the clamour of raised voices of some 40-50 children who gather each day on the stoop or in the small front garden of the large house.

Saying that he sees one of his principle roles as sensitizing the community to the children's needs, Rajani admits that local people see the Kuleana drop-in centre as "that place run by two crazy Indians." Both he and Kudrati are of Asian descent.

### Royal debut

Faced with an increasingly hostile world, street children spend a lot of time working up survival strategies — fancy tricks and exaggerated talk.

"Street children spend a lot of time acting," says a Kuleana pamphlet. "Acting is a way that allows them to speak about matters that are otherwise too hard to express. For instance, children will often act out scenes from the most violent episodes in their lives as a way of coping."

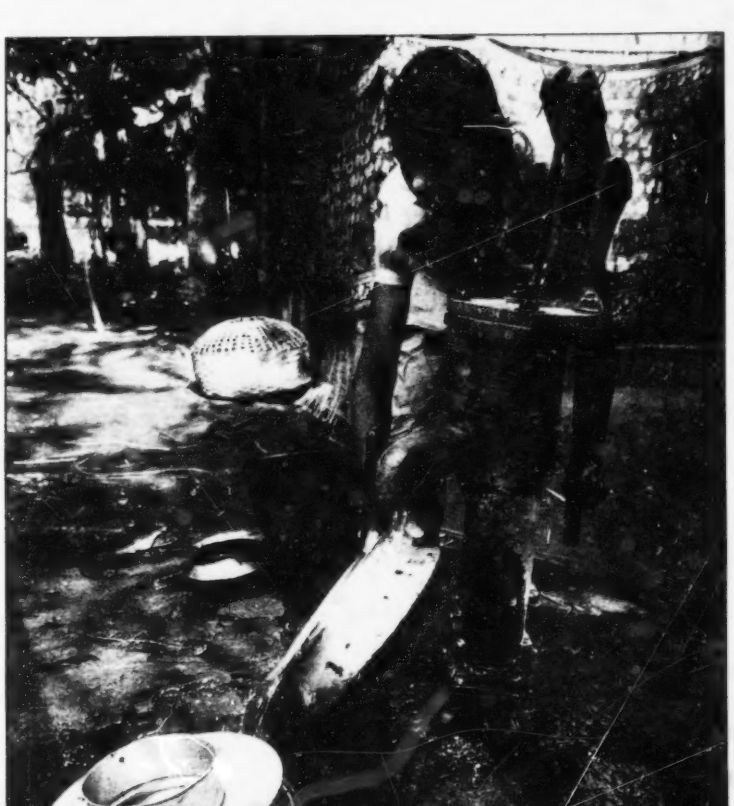
Little Mwita took part in one such performance staged for the Duchess of Kent during her week-long tour in July of UNICEF assisted projects as Patron of the UK Committee for UNICEF. Billed as the 'World Premiere of Mwita Dance International', the performance emphasized the contrast between what some people think of street children and the reality as seen by the children themselves.

Asked what the visit by the Duchess meant to him, Kudrati said, "It will strengthen Kuleana's position in the town. It will give us validity in the eyes of the authorities."

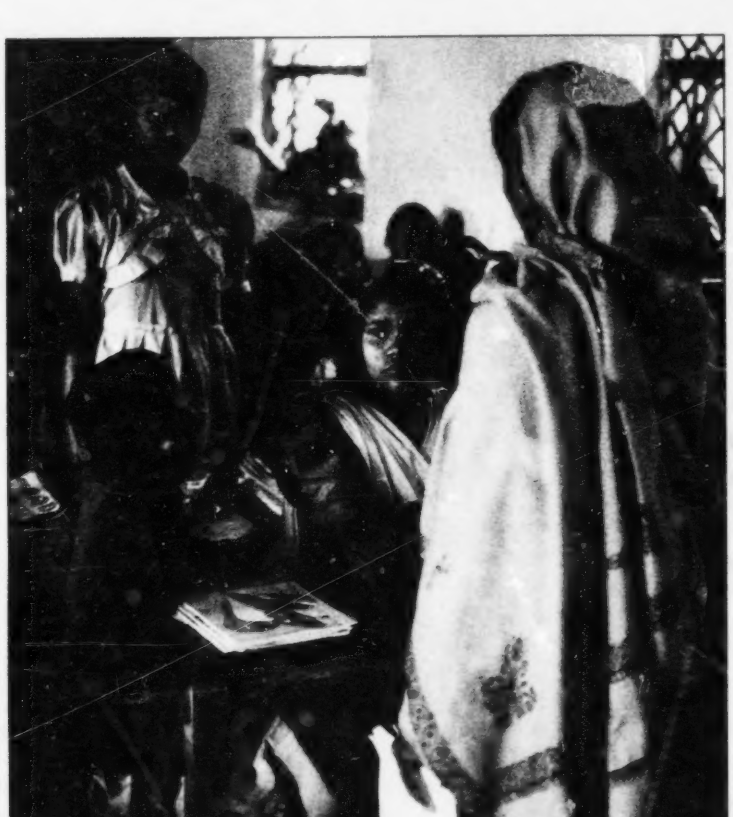
And Mwita a royal debut. There was not a dry eye in the house.

*John Usher, former Chief of the Media Section at UNICEF New York, was in Tanzania during the Duchess's visit.*

# Rahena returns to school



Rahena, responsible for household chores, washes dishes at the pump.



UNICEF/Murray-Lee

Being able to write letters, says Rahena, is a benefit of education that she looks forward to.

UNICEF/Murray-Lee

A one-room straw hut is hom
father.

**By Maggie Murray-Lee**

After an absence of almost six years, 12-year-old Rahena Khatun returned to school in January 1993, thanks to a governmental decree a year earlier making primary school compulsory in Bangladesh. She now studies in an all-girl grade 1 class at the Jafrabad Government Primary School, in Sadar, Rangpur District.

Rahena had dropped out of school to help her mother care for her three younger sisters; her older siblings had married and left home. When her mother died two years ago, Rahena became, at the age of 10, the 'mother' of the family.

Her father is a landless rickshaw driver. At 50, his health is failing, making it increasingly difficult for him to find work. He and his children live in a one-room straw hut belonging to a neighbour. They share the neighbour's tube-well but have no sanitary facilities. Their meagre belongings consist of a few pots and bedclothes which they lay on mats on the bare earth.

Every day Rahena cooks before leaving for school at 10 a.m. Upon her return, she airs the bedding, sweeps the floor, washes the dishes at the pump and prepares the evening meal.

Rahena's father is glad that his daughter has returned to school. "She will be able to make a better marriage," he says.

"I'll be able to write letters," Rahena adds.

### Conditions and attitudes changing

With primary education now compulsory, more children will finish at least four years of school, the minimum necessary for a child to acquire a basic education and essential if Bangladesh is to reach the goal of

Education for All by the year
school, they will have a more
In Bangladesh, as in many
tus of girls and women is refl
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*Maggie Murray-Lee, Comm
Communications Support Fun*

# Education is route to smaller families

***Part of the debate leading up to the International Conference on Population and Development in September 1994, in Cairo (Egypt) revolves around how nations can stabilize their populations while also respecting and meeting families' needs. Education, according to MARGARET CATLEY-CARLSON, President of the Population Council in New York, in her 1993 Paul Hoffman Lecture at the United Nations Development Programme, is the best tool available. Other factors that encourage smaller families are economic development, child survival and shared family responsibility. Excerpts from her speech follow.***

Extensive surveys conducted in 27 countries in the late 1980s found a preference for an average desired family size of six [in sub-Saharan Africa], while in most countries in Latin America, Asia and North Africa, the average desired number of surviving children was between three and four.

These preferences for high fertility [well above the replacement level of two children] and the social and economic insecurity that underlie them are fundamental causes of high birth rates and rapid population growth.

### The economic foundation

We must create conditions — through selective, creative and ethically sound social investment — for women and couples to seek a lower number of surviving children. And these investments, if they are to find political constituents for and acceptance by people in the highest fertility societies, must be affirming of women, men and children of this generation, not simply lay the foundation for a better life for the next generation.

### Inequalities in the family

In many societies, inequality in the roles of mothers and fathers, particularly with regard to rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis children, promotes or sustains high fertility with a significant portion of it unwanted.

When partners disagree over the terms of sexual relations, or disease protection or numbers of children, the male is more likely to dominate. Because men and women have markedly different time and financial obligations to children in some cultures, women hold a clear self-interest in limiting their fertility — which men may not share.

The imbalance between parents in economic and social responsibility for children is becoming more serious. From a population and human welfare perspective, there is no compelling reason why the father-child link is any less important than the mother-child link.

Those who design maternal and child health programmes and early childhood programmes need to develop explicit expectations and supports for fathering. An oral rehydration campaign, which included male imagery in its media, attracted the attention of the community better than those portraying the mother's role alone.

Making men into fathers and increasing their time and income investments in children could have a long-term impact, not only on gender equality, but on children's well-being and the satisfaction that men get from their lives.

Inequality among children independently works to sustain high fertility. Put in the simplest terms, if families feel free to discriminate against some children, the goal of reduced family size may not be attained. A family that under conditions of equality could afford four children, under conditions of inequality may easily have six or seven.

### Children surviving

A high death rate among children and uncertainty among parents about the survival of children encourages high fertility in several ways. It makes the planning of families difficult, as there is always a fear that one or more children will die. The possibility that children will die also discourages parent's investment in their children's health and education, a perverse but very real effect. Parents who feel 'at risk'

Margaret Catley-Carlson.

UNICEF/Murray-Lee

**to Rahena, her three sisters and her**

000. And when girls are required to attend
peful future.
other countries of South Asia, the low sta-
ted in their low literacy and school enrol-
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e migration to urban areas and as addition-
r family survival, the traditional roles of

CEF and the University of Bangladesh in
they viewed the future of girls, found that
ncome earners; then achieving equivalent
as housekeepers. In the same report, girls
rtant for success in life, above money and

s closing in Bangladesh between girls and
5 per cent of all primary school students
ls in rural areas to attend school, the
n for them free up to grade 8.
f cooperation, UNICEF supports govern-
l primary education (the plan is to reach a
of 85 per cent by 1995) and to improve
l children through a non-formal education

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*nications Officer, manages the Global*
*UNICEF New York.*

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require excess births to insure the survival of a smaller number of children to adulthood.

**School for all**

A remedy exists that addresses all three issues raised above: universal primary school education. Better primary school access has the effect of raising the cost of children to parents, but also has the effect of preparing children for the emerging economies of their country and the increasing boundary-less international economy.

In traditional societies with largely agricultural economies, children are a valuable source of labour. School-going children clearly continue to contribute to family economies. [But] as the nature of the child's contribution changes, so must the parents change their expectations from receiving returns on their young children's unskilled labour, to the expectation that they will become the beneficiaries in their old age of the earnings of their skilled, educated children.

And school attendance has a powerful demographic effect. In 34 countries surveyed, girls with secondary education wanted 3.5 children on average. Girls with no education wanted five.

School — for the sake of our children, for the sake of our planet.

# *To eliminate torture, the first step is to expose it*

***The Convention on the Rights of the Child states: "No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (article 37).***

***Yet, all over the world children suffer this terrible fate, some because they are seen as threats, others to force confessions from parents, still others to intimidate communities. And when one or more of their family members disappear, are murdered o: are subjected to cruel and inhuman practices, children too are victims. ALEXIA LEWNES reports.***

In 1989, in a South Asian country, a group of children was detained by the police for suspicion of theft. A 13-year-old girl was stripped and beaten and a 12-year-old boy was given electric shocks and beaten with a leather belt. Another boy was stripped, hung upside down from the ceiling and beaten until he fell unconscious.

In a Middle Eastern country, in 1992, a 16-year-old girl was among a group of students taken into police custody. Her mother, asked to collect the girl's body, discovered that the left side of her daughter's head was missing. "Her body was in pieces. Her hands were torn between the fingers. Cigarettes had been extinguished on her body. Her body had been burned all over," reported the girl's grandfather.

In a South American country, a 14-year-old boy, in 1989, described how he was treated by the police. "I have been detained many times," he said. "The police get hold of us and start torturing us. They burn us with cigarettes, throw hot water on us, beat us with truncheons, on the head, on the hands .... They make us eat cockroaches."

These experiences, unfortunately, are not aberrations. Children are often targeted as a means of frightening and intimidating their families and communities. "Torture is not just used to extract information," says Joshua Rubenstein, Northeast Regional Director of Amnesty International. "We're talking about a system that is used to intimidate a population, a way to exert political control."

It is used all too widely. The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1984, and as of mid-November 1993, 79 countries had ratified, acceded or succeeded to it. In spite of this, Amnesty International has documented torture and ill treatment in 110 countries and deaths in more than 40. Over one third of the world's countries engage in torture, some of them countries that have ratified the Convention.

**Psychological effects**

While many studies have been conducted on the effects of war on children, the treatment of torture survivors is a fairly new field and there is a limited amount of research on the impact of torture on children. But persistent and debilitating psychological problems are known effects.

"The experience of torture will colour all of a child's development," says Dr. Antonio Martinez, former coordinator of the Marjorie Kovler Center for Treatment of Survivors of Torture in Chicago (US) and currently director for Community Treatment of Survivors of Human Rights Abuses, also in Chicago. "He will not acquire the basic things we take for granted — his trust and basic sense of security is shattered. If there is no sense of security, most likely he will feel undifferentiated and will have no sense of identity.

"What differentiates the trauma experienced by children in war from that of child survivors of torture is the devastating fact that with torture a child or family has been singled out," says Dr. Martinez. "In war, you see destruction all around you but everyone is in the same boat."

Also, a family that has experienced torture can lose its sense of support. Often the extended family and community are afraid to associate with them. "It's clear persecution," he adds.

Intense fear, often stimulated by sirens, people in uniforms or the sound of car engines at night, is common in children who have been tortured. Withdrawal, depression, irritability, aggressiveness, generalized fear, excessive clinging and dependence on the parents are other frequent problems.

As these children grow to adults they may develop seemingly unrelated physical symptoms, including headaches, stomachaches and backaches. "A majority of torture survivors go through life not understanding that the symptoms they have today — sometimes 20 to 30 years later — occur from the original trauma," says Dr. Martinez.

**Family toll**

"All family members are survivors of torture by virtue of the fact that one member has been tortured and all need treatment," says Dr. Martinez.

In a study of 75 Latin American children of exiled torture survivors living in Denmark in 1985, it was found that more than one third were anxious, hypersensitive to noise, and suffered from insomnia and frequent nightmares, and 23 per cent regularly wet the bed at night. Other studies have confirmed these results.

Many torture survivors psychologically withdraw from reality, losing interest in their children or spouse. The home typically becomes a depressive place where physical health is a constant preoccupation, where the independence of the growing child, particularly in adolescence, is interpreted as betrayal, where privacy is given little priority and children are taught to mistrust others.

**Reaffirming humanity**

It can be particularly difficult to treat young children who are survivors of torture. "A child doesn't understand why something has happened to him," says Dr. Martinez. "He can't rely on his experiences to give meaning to what has happened."

Art therapy and play therapy, as well as role-playing, are frequently used in treating children. Dr. Martinez explains that the most critical part of treatment is to make the child feel safe.

"He needs to find one adult who will send the message: 'I will stick by you, I will fight for you, I love you.' Once that happens, 75 per cent of the job is done."

**Exposure needed**

The first step towards eliminating torture is to expose it, according to Mr. Rubenstein. Governments need to publicly renounce torture and end the practice of giving amnesty to those who might be prosecuted for it.

The Convention has a monitoring body — the Committee against Torture — which reviews state reports on measures taken to abide by the Convention. But there is no real mechanism for enforcement, says Mr. Rubenstein, who feels a permanent international tribunal needs to be established to address all human rights violations and prosecute those who practise them.

## Legal recourse and medical care

In March 1992, the United States became the first country in the world to inaugurate legislation offering torture victims the legal right to sue their oppressors for civil damages. The legislation covers not only alien residents of the US, but also any American citizen who may have been tortured abroad. "It's one of several weapons that can be used to fight torture," says Patricia Armstrong, staff attorney at the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights.

Already a number of cases have been filed under this new law, the most celebrated one the suit against the Bosnian-Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, brought by women and men who were raped and/or suffered gross human rights abuses during the conflict in former Yugoslavia. At press time, the defendant had filed a motion to dismiss and a decision from the judge was pending.

**Centres for specialized care**

For victims of organized violence the need for specialized care is growing, as more refugees seek asylum around the world and more doctors are called upon to answer human rights questions both in legal proceedings and fact-finding missions.

Currently, more than 90 centres offer such specialized care, in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, the UK, the US and in countries in Latin America.

## Defining torture

The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions" (article 1).

UNICEF/Apted

**Mrs. Loan breastfeeds; her mother is on her right.**

# 'Facts for Life' gives families in Viet Nam hope for future

**By Maurice Apted**

Two hundred kilometres north of Hanoi, in the Yen Bai Province, the landscape is picture-postcard perfect, a patchwork of rice paddies, forested knolls and thatched houses with sloping roofs.

It is difficult to imagine that such beauty coexists with serious problems — low literacy rates, high birth rates and poor nutrition.

But along with problems there is also hope and one very special woman, Dang Thi Loan, embodies this spirit. A member of the Dao minority group of northern Viet Nam, Mrs. Loan is one of thousands of women benefiting from a Women's Union informal education project, which uses *Facts for Life* (FFL) to teach mothers and young women how to improve family health.

**Setting an example**

Mrs. Loan, who rises every morning at 4 a.m. to pound the rice and prepare breakfast for her mother, husband and two young children, has changed her life because of the project.

"I learned about why I should practise family planning from the *Facts for Life* study sessions organized in my commune, and now my husband and I practise family planning," she says. Mrs. Loan adds that she is using an IUD, an innovation in Viet Nam.

She also breastfeeds her younger child, even though it means more work for her. Mrs. Loan volunteers some startling information: "I gave my baby colostrum at birth." In rural Viet Nam this is a very uncommon baby feeding practice and is actually discouraged traditionally. The FFL project has worked tirelessly to combat this harmful taboo.

After breakfast Mrs. Loan heads off to the fields to tend her rice patch and small vegetable garden. Her husband goes to hunt, while her mother takes care of the younger child.

Mrs. Loan will return to breastfeed later in the day, although her toddler now also feeds on rice gruel, green vegetables and sometimes an egg. Protein foods are generally in short supply but the FFL project has explained the necessity of proper child nutrition.

**Creditworthy**

Described as a bright light in her community by the Women's Union representative, Mrs. Loan hopes to borrow money from the rural women's credit scheme, which is UNICEF-supported and managed by the Viet Nam Women's Union.

The scheme offers families loans of about US$30 to help buy chicks, fishlings, mulberry seedlings, silk worms, vegetable seedlings, bees and bee-keeping supplies, equipment and tools, depending on family needs and local circumstances. Training in how to use these income-generating supplies and continued informal education using FFL are also provided.

Mrs. Loan hopes to buy some chickens, some simple farming tools and vegetable seedlings, maybe even save for a pig. She will be able to feed her family better and sell the surplus, very much in the spirit of the country's market economy reforms. She also hopes to buy more cotton and weave more of the traditional mountain cloth to sell.

"If I can make more things to sell, then my children will be able to stay in school," she reasons. Viet Nam's mountainous regions are experiencing alarming drop-out rates because of its changing economy and its effects on school facilities and teacher salaries.

The biggest obstacle to better family health for most mountain dwellers is poverty. By improving the family economy, people are able to respond to health and welfare programmes designed to reduce child and maternal sickness, improve child care and nutrition, increase school attendance, — especially for girls, and improve the overall quality of rural family life.

Mrs. Loan is hopeful for the future but also aware that the road ahead will not be easy. "My life is very hard. My day begins at 4 a.m. and finishes at 9 p.m. — preparing, cooking, feeding, growing and harvesting! This is what I must do to survive."

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*Maurice Apted is Programme Communications Officer, UNICEF Hanoi.*

# Year of the Family

*continued from page 1*

A single, universal definition no longer fits, as family form and function evolve.

All families, however, share a role and responsibility to provide emotional and financial support to members, particularly infants and children. The family remains a primary source of nurture, as well as a conduit for values, culture and information. In a broader sense, the family strengthens individuals and acts as a vital resource for development.

"The family is the first line of defense for the child and a major factor in the survival, health, education, social development and protection of children," says Sreelakshmi Gururaja, Project Officer, Women's Development Programme at UNICEF. The love or fear, confidence or insecurity children experience while in their parents' care will inevitably colour their view of the world.

"We don't quite know how children will be affected by the transitions we see today, but we're now seeing the risks involved in transition," says Donald Wertlieb, Director of the Center for Applied Child Development at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts (US). "Without proper support and without replacement of the family's function, children grow up without their basic needs — shelter, food and security — met."

**Unemployment's toll**

Families are losing their ability to adapt to reversals in income. Social services budgets have been slashed because of faltering economies in the industrialized world and structural adjustment policies in developing countries. Unemployment rates are on the rise in many parts of the world, with young people particularly vulnerable.

In Poland, for instance, the youth unemployment rate is twice that of average. In Romania, one third of all registered unemployed are under 25 years of age; in Bulgaria, 43 per cent are under 30. Long-term unemployment is increasing and, since most unemployed youth are unskilled, hopes of reintegration are scant.

**Families fall apart**

Unemployment and the resulting loss of income can precipitate family break-ups; psychic and nervous strain, even suicide; homelessness; drug abuse and violence.

"It is very difficult to have loving, caring relationships when you have the emotions of hunger, anger and desperation," says M. Janice Hogan, Professor in the Department of Family Social Science at the College of Human Ecology at the University of Minnesota (USA).

In Chile, one out of every seven children is born of a teenage mother and domestic violence occurs in one out of every four households, according to the Minister in charge of the National Women's Service. Rapid changes in Chilean society — democratization, accelerated economic growth, urbanization, the entry of women into the workforce, greater mass media coverage emphasizing both consumerism and violence — have placed new demands on the family. Frustration, outbursts of brutality, individualism, solitude and family disintegration have all appeared.

According to a report released by the United Nations, women in Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire have been forced to play a greater role as providers, competing with men in the informal sector because of economic pressures. Children are leaving school earlier to contribute to the economic survival of the household and they are swelling the ranks of street children.

Participants at a meeting on the situation of families in Asia and the Pacific discussed the social changes the region was experiencing, leading to greater numbers of children in difficult circumstances, including those living or working on the street, and a higher incidence and severity of child abuse, juvenile crime and substance abuse.

"The problems of unmet needs of children stem from the poverty of families, the gender inequalities, the environmental deprivations in which they live and their lack of access to basic knowledge, skills and resources necessary for protection, survival and development," says Ms. Gururaja.

**Women's changing roles**

Perhaps the most significant impact of economic and demographic change has been on women. Today, in one out of every three households in the world, a woman is the sole breadwinner.

A number of factors are at play: Migration and economic recession have led more women to work outside the household, and more marriages now end in divorce.

Women's work inside the home doubles their burden. "Women are spending increasing time working both in and out of households, and receiving less recognition of their contributions," says Georgianne Baker, Associate Director of Women's Studies at Arizona State University at Tempe (US), who is leading a workshop on Families and Gender Equity Education, in Valletta (Malta) at the NGO Forum to launch IYF (28 Nov.-2 Dec.). "They need support from other members of the family."

Among the year's goals will be advocating for an expanded role for fathers, as nurturers, educators and sources of emotional support.

**Support is needed**

The retreat of governments from a leading role in providing social services may leave families, often only marginally prepared, to assume the responsibility.

*The Human Development Report 1992*, issued by the UN Development Programme, concludes that if developing countries are to trade on an equal basis with industrialized countries, they will need massive investments in people, enlarging their opportunities for education, health care, income and employment.

G. Andrea Cornia, Senior Project Officer at the UNICEF International Child Development Centre in Florence (Italy), agrees, emphasizing that economic factors influence families the same way they influence individuals. "If you want to help families, give them the same support you would give individuals," he says.

One solution that can ease the burden of mothers entering the workforce is providing subsidized day-care services, according to Samuel Kojo Andoh, Associate Professor of Economics at the Southern Connecticut State University (US), who stresses that such an investment could pay off significantly years later. "In the short term, countries are doing away with social services that may balance the budget, but deny the mother an opportunity to enter the labour force," says Mr. Andoh. "Sometimes we stress short-term objectives at the expense of long-term ones."

It has become clear that greater opportunities — and funding — are contingent on political will. "Policies and initiatives have to make living wages a reality," says Ms. Hogan. "The community has to find ways for people to get jobs, education and health care."

## *How a safe place 'between the guns' was created for children*

When the cold war reached its peak in 1984 and some 70 'small wars' were spreading destruction around the world, the chief Swedish delegate to the UNICEF Executive Board, Nils Thedin, made a speech that was little noted at the time, but proved momentous later, according to the late Varindra Tarzie Vittachi.

Surveying the terrible toll on children — who are half of all civilian casualties of modern wars — Thedin called on UNICEF to "awaken an awareness all over the world of the special status of children." He urged that children be recognized by everyone "as a conflict free zone."

In this detailed study of UNICEF's work, Mr. Vittachi, former UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for External Relations, reports how the organization advocated innovative applications of Thedin's idea and was able to enter war zones and immunize against the six vaccine-preventable diseases that were claiming the lives of millions of children each year.

In El Salvador, in 'Operation Lifeline' in the Sudan, in the 'Corridors of Peace' in Iraq, Lebanon, Uganda and former Yugoslavia, UNICEF has managed to get adversaries in situations of ruthless conflict to acknowledge, by the silence of their guns, a common interest in their young. Mr. Vittachi's fluid, conversational narrative tells how it was done. Each situation was different and success was hard won. In some cases, there was no success.

Most significant about the UNICEF experience of helping to create 'Zones of Peace' for children, writes Mr. Vittachi, is that "it has touched a core of human value deep in the consciousness even of men who have been raised and trained in a military culture. Napoleon Duarte and his guerilla opponents, Milton Obote, Okello and Museveni in Uganda, al-Bashir in the Sudan, have each been trained to win wars without compunctions but they have all been stirred in that deep place within them which responds to the call of children."

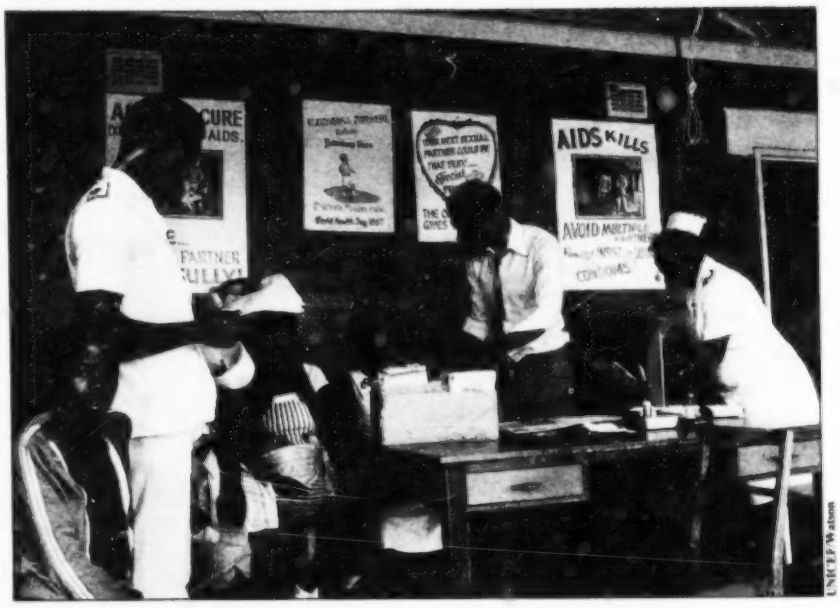
The young are the principal victims of war, writes Mr. Vittachi in a concluding chapter, as he himself was dying of cancer. "Children lose their life opportunities, even the meagre life opportunities of the poorest. They lose years of schooling, they lose their health and become stunted in body and mind because of early malnutrition brought by disease and lack of fresh and sufficient food, and they lose their young green lives. That is, I believe, what touches even the flintiest hearts which have been hardened by the military culture."

*Between the Guns: Children as a Zone of Peace, by Varindra Tarzie Vittachi, published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, ISBN 0340 602317, is available from the UNICEF Gift Shop or its Research, Programme Publications and Library (RPPL) Section, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Telephone: (212) 702-7209; fax: (212) 755-1449. The price is US$8.95, and all royalties from book sales will be donated to UNICEF.*

# Let's talk: Zimbabwe's AIDS Action Programme for Schools

***Part of a life skills curriculum that will eventually cover children from grade 4 to the last year of high school inclusive, a series of texts is breaking important new ground in the fight against AIDS in Zimbabwe.***

**By Adrian Hughes**



UNICEF/Watson

**The posters on the walls of the Chikwaka Rural Hospital are a vital part of health education in Zimbabwe aimed at halting the spread of AIDS.**

"What are good friends? Can you lie to your parents in order to attend a party? Can you buy popularity? How does your way of dressing affect others?"

These questions do not directly address HIV or AIDS, but they represent an important step in Zimbabwe's struggle to secure an AIDS-free generation.

They are featured in a new series of books, entitled *Let's Talk*, introduced to students in grade 7 of Zimbabwean primary schools last year. The series, which aims to help children assess their own situation and make informed decisions, is considered by Zimbabwean educationalists to be one of the most advanced school initiatives to combat AIDS in any developing country.

### The power to decide

"We especially concentrated on the desperate need to empower girls to make decisions," says Mrs. Eunice Pfende of the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education and Culture, speaking of *Let's Talk*. The Ministry developed the series with UNICEF assistance.

"Neither the Shona nor Ndbele culture encourages individuals to think for themselves," says Mrs. Pfende. "When major decisions are to be made, options are discussed primarily by the men, and foremost by the elders. If the matter directly affects a woman (for example, her marriage), she will be asked for her opinion, but she is expected and socialized to submit to the family decision."

In this environment, women acquiesce to the desires of men; when men want sex, women provide it, according to Mrs. Pfende.

"The *Let's Talk* AIDS Action Programme for Schools is the first step in the very ambitious task of changing that pattern," says Mrs. Pfende. "The books also try to fill a gap in sexual education opened by the Westernization of Zimbabwean society. In our traditional culture, the uncles and aunts of a child were expected to give sexual guidance. Most Zimbabweans over 20 have an extremely close relationship with an uncle or aunt, in which they can discuss the most intimate details. But when the institution of the extended family began to crumble, we had to find other means to provide children with the capacity to deal with sexual matters."

### Soaring figures

Spurring the need for informed decisions is the disturbing growth of AIDS cases. According to the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, 119 new AIDS cases were reported in Zimbabwe in 1987; in 1992, more than 8,000 new cases were reported.

However, out of the total 21,500 people currently reported to have AIDS in Zimbabwe, only 548 are between the ages of 5 and 20. Thus the government strategy is to keep this generation AIDS free.

"For almost a decade we have wanted a programme to enhance children's ability to make decisions," says Mrs. Pfende. "But it gave way to other, mainly economic, priorities in the years after independence. AIDS has made decision-making skills less a luxury than a life necessity. When UNICEF approached us with ideas in this direction, we immediately seized the opportunity."

### Teaching children how to take a stand

From the start, the difficulty of changing behaviour was recognized.

"People don't act according to their level of information alone," explains Dr. Joe Vere of UNICEF Harare, pointing to his chain-smoking colleague, Ivan Smith. Smith and Vere are two Zimbabwean consultants hired by UNICEF to assist the Ministry of Education and Culture in developing the *Let's Talk* books.

**"AIDS has made decision-making skills a life necessity."**

"Ivan knows how dangerous it is to smoke, yet he devours at least two packs a day," says Dr. Vere.

Mr. Smith coughs a laugh. "No one can be forced to make the right decisions, no matter how well information is disseminated," he says. "When talking of AIDS, high-risk behaviour is closely connected with sexual behaviour in general and related to issues such as peer pressure, self-reliance, self-assurance and self-analysis. If Zimbabwean children are to cope with AIDS, they have to learn to cope with all these."

"The *Let's Talk* books present children with a series of situations where they have to take a stand," says Dr. Vere. He gives an example of the type of dilemma posed: "'What would you do if you had broken a window when nobody saw it, and the headmaster announced that everybody would be punished mildly because nobody had admitted the crime?' AIDS is only one of many problems where pupils' informed decisions are required."

### Participatory approach

*Let's Talk* introduces a new teaching methodology into Zimbabwean schools. Students participate voluntarily in discussions and there are no examination demands.

"The participatory approach had to be a key factor," says Dr. Vere. "If people are to make qualified decisions, they have to be familiar with going through the pros and cons. Normally in Zimbabwean schools the teacher is the know-all and puts knowledge into the pupils' heads as if they were empty."

Because of the novelty of the approach, 55,000 teachers in the country will need training. UNICEF is assisting the Ministry of Education and Culture with a training model, and the Ministry has held a workshop with officers from each of the country's provincial school administrations to orient them. The officers will teach the method to representatives from the districts, who in turn will teach it to a headmaster and one teacher from each of the schools.

UNICEF also supports the Ministry with transport and office equipment and assists in the training of lecturers and pre-service teachers at colleges. Furthermore, UNICEF helps with the training of coordinators who work directly with the schools to strengthen the classroom impact of the books.

"We realize that it will be difficult to implement this way of teaching in schools with fewer resources," says Mrs. Pfende. "But I myself have worked with classes of up to 60 pupils and it can be done. One has to go outside and divide the pupils into smaller groups and tell them that one is on the lookout for the most effective role play. But once the children get used to it, they divide themselves into groups automatically."

Presently, teachers receive recognition based on how many pupils pass their exams. To maximize the results of the new curriculum, UNICEF has urged the Ministry of Education and Culture to give teachers recognition for the way they deal with the participatory classes.

"Despite the difficulties at the blackboard, we are convinced that the books will have an important influence," says Mrs. Pfende. "The *Let's Talk* series deals with subjects which relate directly to the children's everyday problems. The subjects will definitely be pursued out of class."

*Adrian Hughes is a consultant writer for UNICEF Harare.*

# Peace Circus goes to Lichinga and the show goes on

**By Jane Springer**

The sun is falling into where Lake Niassa should be (they say you can see it in the rainy season), flushing the sky with the same orange-red as the laterite soil. In every direction people head home for supper.

But here in the training centre, three kilometres from the town of Lichinga (Mozambique), a meeting is beginning that will continue until almost 10:30 p.m. No one will eat, but no one complains. "That's the way it is," Rui Assubuji (one of the media people) explains, "sometimes we don't eat till midnight."

Rui is one of 12 young artist-educators who make up the front line of the Peace Circus, a project developed by UNICEF in Mozambique, marking the end of the horrific war waged for over 16 years by Renamo rebels against the Government.

The Circus uses music, dance, film, theatre, games, art and journalism to expand the skills of Mozambican children, their sense of themselves and encourage them to be active in the national movement for peace and reconciliation.

It is no normal circus. While it embodies the concept of a travelling road show that brings new attractions and performances that amaze, this Circus is interactive. It researches local cultures and methods of conflict resolution and incorporates the information into its activities.

### Training for peace

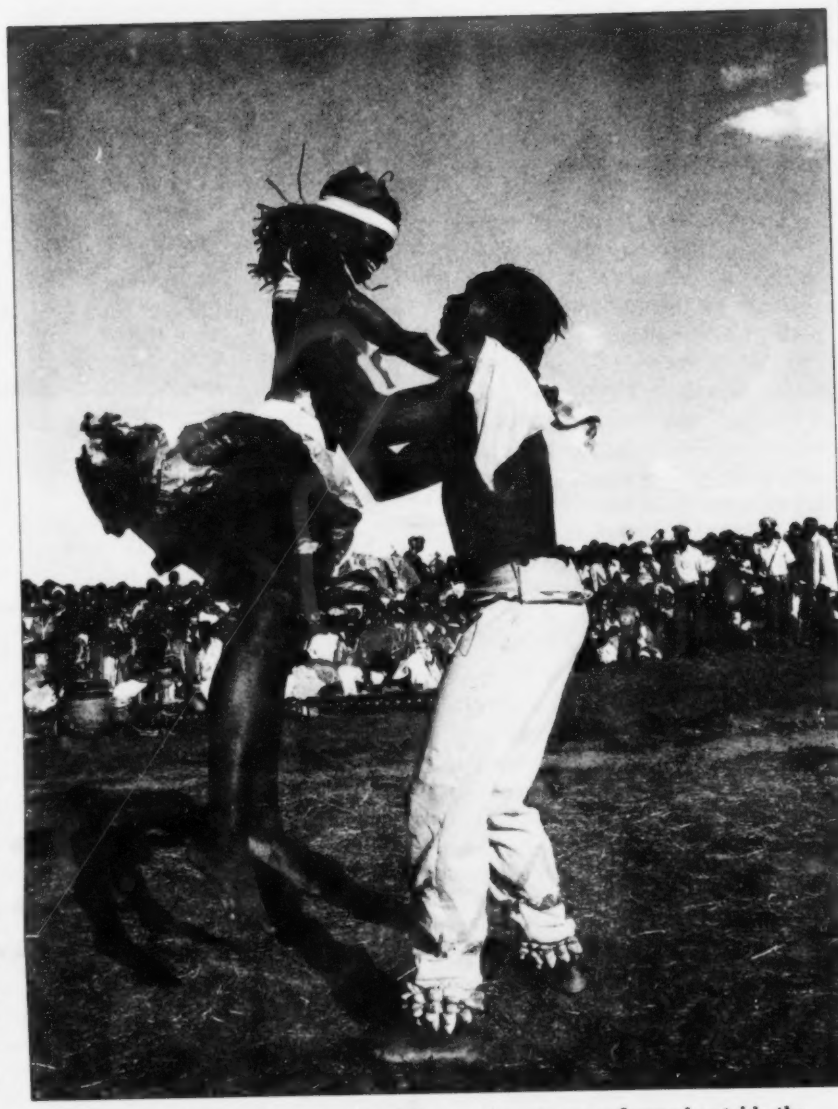
Perhaps most important, the Circus trains local artist-educators to continue the work. The 12 artist-educators went through a vigorous three-month training programme in Maputo in conflict resolution and in education through art and are now in Lichinga, the capital of remote Niassa Province, on the first leg of their two-year journey through rural Mozambique. On the road they, in turn, will train local artists and educators to work creatively with children.

The meeting this night involves debate on whom to invite to a presentation that 38 trainees from Niassa will give on their projects. Everyone has a say in the decision about potential partners — and from it gains a clearer notion of the role of government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such discussions help ensure that activities will continue once the original Peace Circus moves on.

The Niassa trainees were chosen from candidates suggested by delegations from the Ministries of Culture and Youth, Education and Agriculture, as well as the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) and the Renamo Youth League. There are five women in the trainee group, including two nuns.

### Tapping forgotten potential

Niassa, Mozambique's 'forgotten' province, has received very little of the aid so visible elsewhere. It is a place where many 'undesirables' were placed in re-education camps after independence, and where thousands of 'unemployed' were sent to work in the fields in the early 1980s as part of an infamous forced migration called 'Operation Production'.



UNICEF/3336/Norlen

**Last year, the Mozambique National Dance Company performed outside the capital for the first time and brought its 'Ode a Paz' to communities formerly isolated by the recently ended civil war. Here members perform the 'Semba', a local dance, in the town of Metangula.**

Many of these people would like to return to their homes, but cannot afford the airfare and in many cases have lost all touch with their families. Promises have been made to the people of the province — but very few of them realized. So the trainees' expectations about their projects are tempered with doubts.

They are enthusiastic about what they have learned, however. Dancer and choreographer Timote Asumane is 22 and part of a group setting up a dance school. Members want to work with children, especially those affected by the war, "to help them discover the things in them that they don't know about yet," he says. He credits the Circus with demonstrating a new teaching strategy that "respects children's differences," helps them "deal with conflicts" and allows them "to say what they want to learn."

Jose Manuel, 31, works repairing radios and televisions and says that until now he has had little experience with children. He is in the painting group, where he was pleased to get painting lessons, including how to mix colours.

Most memorable, he says, was learning to use local materials "in a way I thought impossible." The group discovered five different dyes using local earth and leaves and produced paper from sunflower stalks. Jose and his friends remembered a glue that could be extracted from a local tree — as well as a plant that yields varnish for clay pots — and demonstrated these to the Circus people. "What we've learned here is also a way of making a living," he summed up proudly.

The Circus members are optimistic yet humble in discussing the long-term effects of their work. "We can only hope that they will encounter some resources to continue their activities," says Rui.

But building on the experience of the Niassa Delegation of the Cultural Association of the Casa Velha, which is hosting the Circus, and the support of institutions like the CCM, they expect the Lichinga Circus to take off and to begin to touch the lives of the province's children. Meanwhile the 12 will take their experience to the next province, Nampula, where, with the help of local government agencies and NGOs, they will see what local artistry they can uncover and encourage.

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*Jane Springer, now in India, was Assistant Reports Officer, UNICEF Maputo.*

# *Cambodian women set agenda for action*

**By Tony Oliver**

In September 1993, Cambodia adopted a new constitution guaranteeing women the same rights as men. Credit must go in part to the efforts of women who organized and participated in the National Women's Summit, sponsored by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) earlier in the year. The meeting drafted a five-point Agenda for Action that called for full national recognition, participation, equal rights, development and solidarity of women in Cambodia. The women pointed out that they are major economic producers — farmers, entrepreneurs and professionals — that they form nearly 60 per cent of the Cambodian population and that a third of all women are heads of households.

The women demanded: inclusion at all levels of policy-making; protection against domestic violence; alimony for deserted and divorced women; fair labour laws that promote and protect equal employment opportunities and conditions of work and wages both in the public and private sectors; and protection for commercial sex workers. They also insisted that the new Government improve urban and rural women's access to skills, technology, information, health and education.

Nearly all of these demands have been included in the new Constitution. Thirteen articles address women's concerns and grant them the following rights and protections.

**Political**:

- The right to vote and to be candidates.
- The right to attend the National Congress.
- The right to actively participate in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation.

**Social and economic rights and protections**:

- The right to choose employment appropriate to their ability and the needs of society.
- The right to obtain social security.
- The right to form and to be members of trade unions.
- Household work is to be considered equal to outdoor work.
- A woman cannot lose her job because of pregnancy. Women should have the right to maternity leave with salary, with no loss of seniority or other social benefits.
- All forms of discrimination against women shall be abolished.
- Exploitation of women's work shall be prohibited.
- The equality of men and women in all fields is affirmed, especially in marriage and the family.
- Prostitution and the sale of individuals are prohibited.
- The State and society are called upon to help women lacking support, especially those in rural areas, gain professional careers and have access to health insurance, education and appropriate living conditions.
- The State is called upon to build maternity and children's centres, and to assist women who have children but who have little or no support.

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*Tony Oliver is Communications Officer, UNICEF Phnom Penh.*

# NGOs and the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Can this relationship work?

**By Sara Ann Friedman**

NGOs played a major role in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). They have also been instrumental in achieving 153 ratifications in only four years. Promoting implementation, NGOs have been using their well-established advocacy skills with a new twist: As they continue to mount public campaigns on children's rights, and as they continue to press governments to support the CRC with new legislation and to enforce existing laws, NGOs are increasingly framing their diverse activities in the unifying language of the Convention.

And now, many NGOs see themselves in a new, equally important role: Using their expertise and experience to help the Committee on the Rights of the Child — the 10-member body of experts responsible for monitoring the progress made by States Parties — bring the Convention to life.

**Document with a soul**

The CRC is a powerful and eloquent document, unique among international conventions: It is far closer to universal ratification in the four years since its adoption than any of the other, older conventions. Linking the traditional notions of civil and political human rights with social and economic development, it is the first to address the rights of children in such a far-reaching and holistic manner. The CRC is a document with a "soul," according to Thomas Hammarberg from Sweden, former head of the NGO Rädda Barnen, and current member of the Committee.

The Convention is driven by a deep vision best expressed in articles 2, 3, 6 and 12: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life which includes the right to survival and development; and the most innovative part of the Convention — the importance of asking and listening to children themselves to learn what is in their best interests. The spirit of the Convention's reporting process will be ongoing and include "constructive dialogue" with governments, not "finger pointing," Hammarberg says. Defining problems will lead to concrete and innovative solutions that include technical and development assistance.

**The Committee's Herculean task**

Putting flesh and bones on that spirit has already proved a Herculean task for the Committee which must read, review and discuss thousands of pages of country reports; gather firsthand and background information; try to measure progress by some kind of universal and meaningful standard — all with limited resources. The Committee has already met twice in 1993 to review 11 country reports. (As States Parties must submit their first country report within two years of ratification, 20 reports already await attention and many more are overdue.)

The Committee has expressed its concerns to governments about specific and sensitive issues inadequately addressed in the reports — for example, flogging and genital mutilation in the Sudan, and excessive force used against child demonstrators in East Timor (Indonesia). The Committee has also made informal visits to Asia and Latin America to visit projects and gain firsthand country knowledge. Requesting additional sessions and resources from the UN so that it can do its job, this active and persistent Committee is another unique feature of the CRC.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is also pursuing a new and vastly different role from other committees in its relationship to NGOs. Taking advantage of its ground-breaking, if obfuscated, right under article 45 — to seek expert advice from specialized agencies, UNICEF and "other competent bodies" — the Committee is actively seeking NGO assistance. Their diverse, global, grass-roots experience puts NGOs in the best position to amplify, provide critical analysis, disagree with or draw attention to serious problems inadequately or incorrectly addressed in State reports.

But only if they are coordinated, warns Mr. Hammarberg. "We have no way of dealing with them all individually. They must try to speak with one voice," he says.

Given the historic tension among the multitude of diverse and individualistic NGOs, and between the NGO community and the UN, turning the phrase, "NGO cooperation," from an oxymoron into a reality is a very tall order. "We are an unruly and independent lot," says Leslie Roberts of the London-based NGO, Anti-Slavery International. "And that's our strength." Still, Ms. Roberts and others acknowledge that NGOs must get their own house in order if a real assessment of national progress is to be made.

**Latin American collaboration**

NGOs and the Committee on the Rights of the Child point to Latin America as the single shining example of successful NGO collaboration — a positive initiative and a model for NGOs in other regions. Growing out of the region's long history of child rights activism, the effort began in 1990 with the support of Rädda Barnen, Peru. By 1992 more than 80 NGOs in 15 countries had formed national committees and created the Latin American Regional Coordinating Committee to develop guidelines, prepare alternative country reports for review by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and produce the Lima Declaration.

This effort brought concrete results. The Committee held its first informal session in Quito (Ecuador), in June 1992, with representatives from the Latin American coalition attending. When the Committee on the Rights of the Child discussed country reports in their June 1993 pre-session, they invited representatives from national committees in El Salvador, Mexico and Peru to participate in the discussions.

There is still much work to be done, says Elizabeth Hallsten of Rädda Barnen, Peru. More governments need to share their reports with NGOs in a more timely fashion and to include them in the process. And more NGOs need to be included in the coalition.

**NGO Group in Geneva**

Formed in 1983, the Geneva-based NGO Group on the CRC promoted and participated in drafting the Convention. Shifting its attention to monitoring and implementation, this group of more than 30 international NGOs has made facilitating the coordination of national and regional coalitions a major priority. "Twenty organizations working together could be 20 times more effective than each working alone," says Laura Bergman, the new coordinator of the NGO Group. Organized, the NGOs have more credibility with governments and the public, greater resources and strength in getting and keeping children's issues on the national agenda.

Ms. Bergman sees the Convention as a powerful vehicle to help strengthen NGOs in countries where they are weak, or to bring them together in a common cause where they are numerous, but disorganized, competitive and isolated from one another. She decries the inadequate communication system in which information from Geneva "doesn't even trickle" to the field where it is most needed. Bergman sees her role as facilitator, or resource, to help local NGOs understand the benefits and "how to's" of coalition building and to disseminate information — on dates, guidelines, procedures and processes for alternative reports — as quickly as possible from Geneva to NGOs in the field.

NGOs interviewed for this article also expressed frustration with the "fuzziness" of goals and guidelines emanating from the Committee on the Rights of the Child and with the slow pace of getting States Reports through the UN system. "Things need to be speeded up and better clarified," said Nigel Cantwell, Director, International Monitoring, of Defense for Children International (DCI) secretariat for the NGO Group. He and others believe that the Committee on the Rights of the Child must be more precise about what it needs, to give guidance as well as feedback, and to rethink what they want in written submissions from State Parties and from NGOs. There is such a long list of questions that "the woods hide the trees," he said. This allows States to hide or divert attention from important issues.

**Theme Day**

Others believe that a lack of clarity, focus and preparation is particularly evident during Theme Day — a single

*continued on page 14*

**The Convention enshrines the right of all children to survive and develop.**

# *Solving conflicts: South African NGO shows the way*

**By Pat Mkhize**

The culture of violence that has existed in South Africa since the Soweto riots of 1976 has serious consequences for children. To address this issue, the Community Conflict Management and Resolution (CCMR), a small Johannesburg NGO, has initiated a School Mediation Project which educates students and teachers about the nature of conflict.

The Mediation Project, which involves social workers, women's groups and teachers, operates in 300 schools in the provinces of Natal and Transvaal and reaches 18,000 primary and high school students. Supported by Rädda Barnen and UNICEF, the project provides training, educational materials and opportunities for discussion and role play.

In the project, students learn that tolerance is an essential ingredient of democracy and liberation. They learn to recognize and honour their own needs and interests as well as those of others.

The project embodies the approach of Education for Development, a UNICEF initiative to help children think globally, understand their relationship with others and develop their own capacity to solve problems. Students in this project trained as peer mediators and are now forming their own local associations, which are enabling young people to talk about ethics and peace. Groups of 50 students in Natal, Soweto and other areas are coming together to elect representatives for a regional committee.

CCMR would like to expand the project nationwide but is limited by its present resources. The need cannot be overstated. The process has just begun.

For more information contact: Pat Mkhize, CCMR, PO Box 229, PO Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa.

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*Pat Mkhize is a lawyer and mediator from South Africa. The above article was excerpted from* EDev News, *March 1993, a UNICEF, Education for Development, publication.*

**NGO Action for Children**

Editor: Sara Ann Friedman
Geneva correspondent: Joanna Koch
Working Group: Gordon Klopf (OMEP), chair; Yvonne Asamoah (IASSW); Charlotte Brody (ACEI); Rita Cooper (OMEP); Amelia Dozzi (SO); Nancy Dubrow (WFMH); Rosalind Harris (ISS); Kate Katzki (ICSW); Joanna Koch (LLLI); Paul McCleary (CCF); Roberta Ross (ICJW); Bruce Yeager (PLAN).
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# NGOs and the Committee

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day each year devoted to a single subject, such as: Children in Armed Conflict (October 1992); Economic Exploitation of Children (October 1993); The Family (1994).

No one doubts the potential value of Theme Day, designed to confront and analyse a single issue in depth, bring together diverse groups in the field to share data and find common solutions, develop guidelines that serve as a model for other issues, and help mount better-informed public campaigns that will bring attention to issues many would rather believe do not exist or have been cured by legislation.

At the same time, Leslie Roberts of Anti-Slavery International and others, speaking about the 1993 Theme Day, believe that preparation could have been much improved, the focus narrowed, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child should have had a clearer idea of "what they wanted to get out of it." The series of recommendations, drawn up by the Committee, said Ms. Roberts, was "unexceptional" and could have been presented without a specific theme day.

"Perhaps the problem lies in our expectations," she added. "The Committee on the Rights of the Child is only ten overworked, committed human beings," said Ms. Roberts.

Experts in their own specialized fields, none of them can approach the expertise or commitment of the hundreds of NGOs working in the foxholes to advance children's rights for so many years. Yet the NGOs understand that it is also the very strengths of the Convention — its broad scope and holistic approach — that engender problems of focus.

What this means is that as part of their constructive dialogue with the Committee, the NGO Group should take an active role in creating initiatives and bringing ideas to the Committee.

The Group is beginning to do just that. It is developing a donor network for "technical assistance" to governments in areas such as child labour or juvenile justice. It is also working out a coherent process that will allow for "urgent action" in cases of gross violations, such as the large-scale killing of street children in Brazil.

### Developing social indicators

Another crucial area in which the NGO Group and the Committee on the Rights of the Child have already reached agreement is in the need to develop social indicators that measure problems and progress in children's development. In its country programmes and in helping to develop the World Summit goals, UNICEF has established usable standards in quantifiable areas, such as infant mortality or oral rehydration therapy. But how do you measure the quality — or inequality — of a child's life? The effect of malnutrition on learning skills?

"You need a yardstick to measure these gray areas," particularly for children in especially difficult circumstances, says Per Miljeteig, Director of CHILDWATCH, a new international child-research network NGO, and a source of information for the Committee. *(See article on* Childwatch International. *p. 15.)*

International consultant Judith Ennew is helping the Committee develop indicators for compliance in the "very gray" area of working children. She believes that the best place to start is with existing or easily attainable data, and then to link them in innovative ways. Household surveys that determine the number of working children and what kind of work they do, the number of employer prosecutions for violations of laws, school attendance data (or drop-out rates) and work histories collected from primary health providers, as well as morbidity rates from hospitals, can relate the ages of working children, the nature and extent of their injuries, and give some idea of the unhealthy and hazardous working conditions they endure.

Studying the country reports in detail, Ms. Ennew sees a need within the research community and by the Committee for much greater consistency in developing criteria and research methods that will take into account huge variations in culture and resources. Criteria from different States are often worlds apart, she says. Even within the single country of India, six different set of criteria were used for six different cities to determine the number and condition of working children. In addition, certain Western concepts contained in the Convention, such as the definition of 'orphan' or use of the word 'placement', need to be addressed. The research community also needs to turn its attention to capacity-building among its counterparts in the South, where they have "terrific ideas and talent, but lack the basic tools, confidence, and most of all, information."

Meanwhile, says Ms. Ennew, despite its problems, the CRC is the best policy document we have: It is malleable, visionary, ground-breaking. Breathing life into this document is now in the hands of a new and historic partnership between NGOs and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Working alone they will accomplish little. Working together, it is still an uphill battle, but there is a chance to make a real difference. The world's children have waited long enough.

For NGOs interested in coalition-building or further information, contact: Laura Bergman, Coordinator, NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, DCI, Case Postale 88, CH-1211 Geneva, 20 Switzerland. Telephone: 41-22-734-05-58; fax: 41-22-740-11-45.

For more information about the Latin American national committees, contact: GIN, Secretariat, L.A. Regional Coordinating Committee, Enrique Palacios 735-A, Lima 18, Peru. Tel: 51 14 751077.

**The Convention on the Rights of the Child addresses the rights of all children, included those marginalized by war, poverty, discrimination or disability.**

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*Sara Ann Friedman is editor of* **NGO Action for Children.**

# CONFERENCES

### Social welfare meeting

The 26th International Conference of the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) will be held 3-7 July 1994 in Tampere (Finland). In preparation for the 1995 World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, the ICSW Conference will address the global issues of increasing poverty, social inequality, and tensions between rich and poor countries.

The goal of the Conference is to pass on experience and seek ways for governments, NGOs and international organizations to cooperate. Proposed workshops include: economic solutions for the fight against poverty; health promotion as part of social development; the connection between environment and social issues; and the role of NGOs in promoting social development.

For more information about the Conference, contact: Global Welfare '94, PO Box 63, SF-00501 Helsinki, Finland. Tel: (358)0-701-3839; fax: (358) 0-738-123.

### Population forum

The NGO Planning Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) has been very active since the second PrepCom in May 1993. Staff and Committee members visited Cairo (Egypt) and selected the National Stadium as the site for NGO Forum '94, the NGO event to be held concurrently with the ICPD in Cairo, 5-13 September 1994. NGO representatives are already seeking accreditation for the ICPD process and suggesting caucuses, panel discussions and other presentations for the third PrepCom in April 1994 and for the Forum in Cairo.

The NGO Planning Committee sends details about the Forum and the UN ICPD activities to over 1,100 organizations with interests ranging from the environment and human rights, to family planning and migration.

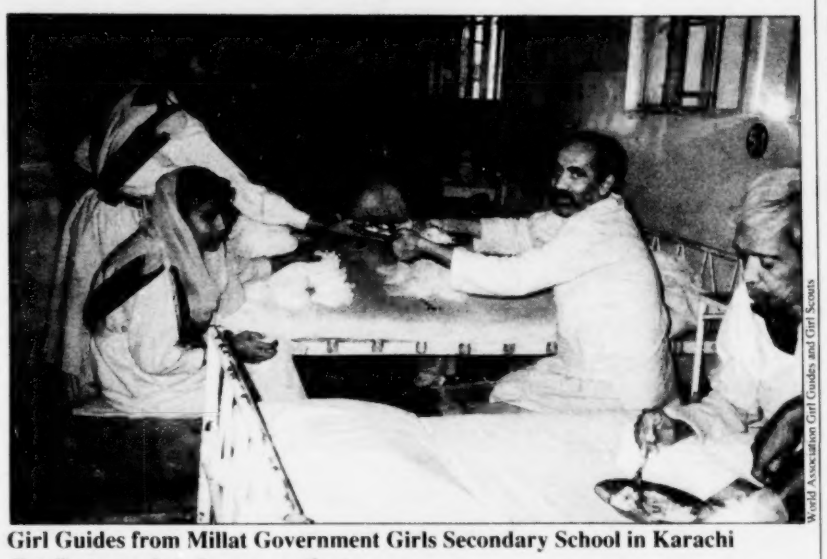
For more information about the Forum and the Conference, contact: NGO Planning Committee for the ICPD, 777 UN Plaza, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel: 212-545-7344.

# Girl Scouts help in leprosy care

Thanks to encouraging results from a fast, relatively inexpensive, and extremely effective new treatment that uses a combination of anti-leprosy drugs called 'multi-drug' therapy (MDT), leprosy is now curable. Since the introduction of MDT in the early 1980s, the global burden of this ancient disease has been reduced by more than 60 per cent. But because of the long history of isolation and shame attached to leprosy, many people still hide their affliction.

In India and Pakistan, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts have been working with health authorities to eliminate the disease and to spread the message that the world can be 'leprosy free'. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), India and Pakistan account for about 70 per cent of the world's known leprosy cases.

In Pakistan, one Girl Guide unit has made an impressive difference. In 1991, 32 Girl Guides (from 11 to 16 years old) in one secondary school in Karachi were trained at the Marie Adelaide Leprosy Centre in skills ranging from checking for leprosy to motivating those with the disease to seek treatment. During the two years since the project began, the Girl Guides have reached



World Association Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

**Girl Guides from Millat Government Girls Secondary School in Karachi distribute meals to leprosy patients.**

over 2,000 girls and 406 teachers in seven schools and 18 outlying communities with leaflets, posters and other forms of education. They also learned to work with patients in the Centre, changing bandages, feeding and dressing them, taking blood pressures and temperatures and providing gifts and entertainment to patients whose families had deserted them.

In India, in early 1993, the Bharat Scouts and Guides initiated a Leprosy-Free Schools Project which involved a variety of public campaigns — signs, door-to-door leaflet distribution, surveys, exhibitions, puppet shows and essay contests.

The Scouts and Guides have screened more than 500,000 children in 3,000 schools, referring all suspected cases for treatment and accompanying them through the treatment process.

## *New NGO puts the spotlight on child research*

CHILDWATCH International, operating since January 1993, is a global research network that brings together all areas of research relating to children and their development. Based in Oslo (Norway), this new NGO is a direct response of the research community to the challenges of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the World Summit for Children.

Its goal, says Per Miljeteig, Director of CHILDWATCH, is to "put the spotlight" on child research that is now scattered and diffused. The NGO will establish channels for exchange of information, communication and cooperation between research groups in order to develop projects, coordinate existing research and encourage new studies. However, the organization will not do its own research. "We want communication, not homogenization," said Mr. Miljeteig.

Consistent with the holistic principles of the CRC, there is a great need, he added, to bring together people from different disciplines — health, psychology, law, etc. — an approach that is not always favoured in industrialized countries.

## Japan's indigenous is focus of NGO

The Shimin Gaikou Center (Citizens' Centre for Diplomacy [CCD]), founded in 1982 by student activists in Japan, has focused its 1993 efforts on indigenous peoples. This is an especially difficult task in a "mono-racial country" where "most Japanese citizens and governmental officials don't even know the concept of 'indigenous peoples' and some are not even aware of the existence of the Ainu People in their own country," according to Hideaki Uemura, a founder of the NGO.

Disrupted in the 1860s from their northern island homes, this peaceful hunting and fishing group today numbers around 24,000. Recognized as an "ethnic minority" but not as an "indigenous people," the Ainu are denied the rights granted indigenous peoples under international law (the 1989 ILO Convention for Tribal and Indigenous Peoples). The NGO is attempting to pressure government ministries to change the status of the Ainu.

During 1993, CCD used education and advocacy to combat threats to indigenous lifestyles and Ainu empowerment projects. CCD has also established a school programme, funded by a 'Peace Tax' of 300 yen (US$2.70) per month, to support education of poor rural islanders in the South Pacific.

"In the future, CCD needs to focus on developing advocacy skills," says Mr. Uemura. "We, and Japanese NGOs in general, need to develop practical skills and gather the hard data needed to influence government and business policy." The NGO hopes to develop stronger links between indigenous peoples in Japan and the South Pacific for mutual support and action.

For more information about CCD, contact: Shimin Gaikou Center, Kikumi-so-201, 2-10-38 Shimo-Renjaku, Mitaka-shi Tokyo 181, Japan; telephone and fax: 81-422-47-9780.

## *Pregnancy and poverty: Major reasons why girls drop out of school*

**By Rebecca Katumba, Women's Feature Service**

Fifteen-year-old Teddy Nabadda sits on her doorstep, nursing her infant son while she sells vegetables. Her mud and wattle rented room in Kampala's sprawling Wandegoya slums overlooks Makerere University, East Africa's oldest institution of higher learning. But Teddy will have to be content to look at the imposing building from afar. Her education came to a standstill in the sixth year of primary school, when she became pregnant. The young father was forced by his family to leave her for an education in England. And Teddy's own father, ashamed of the social stigma, cut off all ties with her. Alone with her baby, Teddy ekes out a living selling vegetables.

A few rooms away, her teenage friend Rose Namusoke sells provisions by the spoonful at her doorstep. "I ran away from home because my father was forcing me to marry the village chief," she says. "He said he could not risk paying my school fees when he knows I will end up pregnant."

The stories of these two girls are repeated in hundreds of households in Uganda. According to the results of a recent study by a local NGO, Action for Development (ACFODE), teenage pregnancies and poverty are mostly responsible for the high drop-out rate among Ugandan schoolgirls. Ministry of Education figures show that only 5 per cent of all Ugandan girls reach secondary school — a figure that is far below the average of 25 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa.

Among the goals of the ACFODE study were to identify problems faced by girls who drop out of school, especially upper primary classes, and to generate recommendations to improve the education of girls in Uganda.

In rural Uganda, early marriages are a major reason for schoolgirl drop-outs. Of the parents interviewed, 52 per cent said that their daughters were married between 13 and 18 years of age. Early marriage is directly linked to cultural values when a pregnant, unmarried daughter becomes a source of acute embarrassment for the family. Moreover, girls who marry young become 'assets' in poverty-stricken families, when sold for large dowries. The report highlights the practice in eastern Uganda where a girl-bride can fetch 40 head of cattle, large sums of cash and other sundry items.

The majority of girls who run away from home to escape a forced marriage, or because they are pregnant and unmarried, live in extreme poverty with no reliable income. Many must also live with the trauma of being disowned by angry parents. These girls, the ACFODE study concludes, live under conditions of "persistent anxiety, which leaves them vulnerable to dangerous situations, including selling sex for money."

The data also imply that foster care can have a detrimental effect on girls' education. The figures indicate a 42 per cent drop-out rate for girls living with relatives, and that 15 per cent had lost their chances of higher education because of pregnancies.

Non-parental guardians, according to the study, tend to give excessive liberty to children in a society where morals have degenerated considerably. In some families girls are mistreated with excessive work. The report also states that the biological children of the guardians are favoured when it comes to education.

Study results all point to the imperative need for a change in attitudes and cultural practices which debase Ugandan girls within families and in school. "There should be vigorous sensitization campaigns for parents to end discriminatory participation in household chores," the study stresses. And parents must be encouraged to talk freely to their children about the problems of adolescence.

Many drop-outs, the study found, long to return to school. Of those interviewed, 82 per cent said they were eager to return to formal education. The remaining 18 per cent could not even wish to return to school because of their overwhelming sense of shame about pregnancy or ill-fitting, often ragged, clothes.

So despondent were they about not completing their education, that most of the girls advised other female students to "guard against men's sexual deviances," to be "well-behaved" and to "learn practical subjects" so they could support themselves if necessary.

The report calls for proper guidance for girls of school age, whether by parents or guardians. It urges that officials responsible for women's affairs — from the national to the community level — must mobilize the girls, especially the drop-outs, into viable groups for their development, ensuring that they can return to school.

ACFODE is setting up programmes to enable girls to resume their studies and develop financial independence. "Some women from Kampala have visited us and have promised to help us learn new things to make life more bearable," said Rose Namusoke, referring to ACFODE's workers. She and her friend Teddy Nabadda are more optimistic about the future now. They say emphatically in chorus, "We are ready to learn whatever they'll teach us."

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*Rebecca Katumba is a journalist from Kenya.*

# RESOURCES

**UNICEF publications**

Available from UNICEF, 3 UN Plaza, RPPL DH-49B, New York, NY 10017, USA.

Available in English unless otherwise noted.

***The State of the World's Children 1994*** report, by James P. Grant. Published by Oxford University Press for UNICEF. Available in many languages. Paperback US$8.

***Children's State of the Planet Handbook,*** written and colourfully illustrated by 'Children of this World' to provide information about the environment for children. Produced by Peace Child International, Netherlands. US$9.95.

The following publications are available from your nearest UNICEF office or National Committee, or from UNICEF, 3 UN Plaza H-9F, New York, NY 10017, USA:

***Children and Health***. Health care messages adapted from *Facts for Life*, for use by those working with and for children. Produced by Child-to-Child Trust (UK) and UNICEF. US$2 per copy for bulk orders. A French version will be available in February.

***Child Neglect in Rich Nations***, by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, analyses the problems of child neglect in the Anglo-American countries. Also available in French. US$6.95.

***Preparing Children to Participate in Their Future: Report of the Education for Development Seminar for Eastern and Southern Africa***, held in Nairobi, 5-9 October 1992. Booklet.

***It's Only Right: A Guide to Learning About the Convention on the Rights of the Child***, by Susan Fountain. This activity book, useful for educators, teachers and youth leaders, uses Education for Development methods to help young people 13 years and over explore, respond to and take action on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Approximately US$10.

***Education and Change in Central and Eastern Europe: Preparing Young People for the Challenge of Change.*** This booklet is the report of the Education for Development Seminar held in Sofia, 6-9 June 1993.

***EDev News,*** Vol. 4, No. 2. The September 1993 issue promotes children's participation in realistic action for the environment.

*The following publications are available from the International Child Development Centre, Spedale degli Innocenti, Piazza SS. Annunziata 12, 50122, Florence, Italy.*

***International Child Development Centre Publications Catalogue***, January 1993. Free.

**Innocenti Occasional Papers:**

***Education and the Market: Which Parts of the Neo Liberal Solution Are Correct?*** by Christopher Colclough. July 1993. Economic Policy Series No. 37. US$8.

***Home-Based Community Day Care and Children's Rights: The Colombian Case,*** by Carlos Castillo Cardona, Nelson Ortiz Pinilla and Alejandra Gonzalez Rossetti. May 1993. Child Rights Series No. 3. Also available in Spanish. US$8.

**Other Publications**

***Helping Children in Difficult Circumstances — A Teacher's Manual.*** Prepared by Naomi Richman, Diane Pereira and colleagues in the Special Education Department, Ministry of Education, Mozambique. Available from Save the Children Fund, Overseas Information Section, 17 Grove Lane, Camberwell, London SE5 8RD, UK. Price £2.95.

***Child-to-Child and Children Living in Camps.*** For use by teachers, health workers and others involved with refugees and displaced people, with suggestions for children as 'health messengers' to improve health of families and communities. Available from Teaching Aids at Low Cost, Box 49 St. Albans, Herts. AL1 4AX, UK. Fax: 44 727 846852.

***Training for All: Developing Video-Based Training Packages for Parent and Community Education***, by Roy McConkey. A free manual written to facilitate use of video by local groups in training parents and community workers how to help children with disabilities. Includes a list of information videos. Available from UNESCO, Special Education Division of Basic Education, 7 place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07-SP, France.

***ICPD 94.*** Bi-monthly newsletter of the **International Conference on Population and Development**, to be held in Cairo, 5-13 September 1994. Available from ICPD Secretariat, 220 East 42 St., New York, NY 10017, USA. Fax: 1212 297 5250.

***Conference '95,*** semi-annual newsletter in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, and **Women 2000,** quarterly newsletter in English, French and Spanish, will provide information on the **4th World Conference on Women** to be held in Beijing, 4-15 September 1995. Available from Conference Secretariat, Division for the Advancement of Women, PO Box 500, A-1400 Vienna, Austria. Fax: 431 237 495.

***Network News*** is the bulletin of the inter-regional Health Learning Materials Programme, which is helping national institutions in developing countries to produce primary health care training and information materials for health staff and communities. Issued three times a year. Available, also in French, from WHO Division of Interagency Affairs, 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva, Switzerland. Fax: 4122 791 0746.

**UNICEF Videos**

Audiovisual materials are available from UNICEF offices and National Committees. (Check with your local office for catalogues.)

***Audrey Hepburn — In Her Own Words.*** 30 minutes. Video on her concern for children and her work as Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF.

***A Miracle at Hand,*** 20-minute video on Jaycees International/ UNICEF cooperation in promoting Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) for children.


## First Call for Children

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Editor: *Patricia Lone*
Assistant Editor: *Alexia Lewnes*
Editorial Assistant: *Hashi Roberts*

Please address all correspondence to: *First Call for Children*, UNICEF, 3 UN Plaza, H-9F, New York, NY 10017, USA. Fax (212)326-7768, Telex 175989.

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